

Beauty | February 9, 2017 | By Korin Miller

## Allison Williams Developed Adult Cystic Acne, So She Gets the Struggle

Here are the best adult acne fixes.



Zits seem like something that should be relegated to the teen years, but they can pop up when you're an adult, too. And sometimes, you develop full-blown acne well after high school—at least, that's what happened to Allison Williams.

In a new interview with *Allure*, the 28-year-old *Girls* star reveals that she suddenly developed acne as an adult. "I was breaking out with cystic acne a few years ago while filming *Girls* and had to go on Accutane [a drug used to treat severe acne] to get it under control," she says. "Luckily, Accutane took care of it really quickly."

Cystic acne is the most severe type of acne, and it causes cystic bumps to form underneath the skin, Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF. “This type of acne usually leads to acne scarring,” he says, noting that cystic acne sufferers may also grapple with whiteheads and blackheads.

Cystic acne usually happens when oil and bacterial debris block a person's pores, Goldenberg explains. This also blocks hair follicles, which results in cysts. “When these bumps burst, they cause lots of inflammation in the tissue and can cause scarring,” he says.

Although many people think acne is a teenage issue, New York City dermatologist Doris Day, M.D., author of *100 Questions & Answers About Acne*, tells SELF that it can and does happen to adults. “It’s really a myth that you outgrow acne after your teenage years,” she says. “Some people don’t even start to develop it until their 20s.”

Teen and adult acne can present differently, Day says. Teenagers tend to develop it all over their face, including their cheeks and forehead, while adults typically get acne along their lower face or jawline—but it can be equally disturbing for the patient, no matter their age. And cystic acne is no joke. “It can cause scarring and be difficult to control,” Day says.

Adult acne is pretty common, especially among women—Goldenberg says it’s the most common type of acne he sees in his practice. “Many of these patients did not have acne as teenagers, but developed it as an adult,” he says. “This is most common in women in their 20s and 30s, but I take care of adult acne in women as late as in their 60s.”

There are several reasons why someone might develop cystic acne as an adult, but board-certified dermatologist Jill Waibel, M.D., medical director and owner of Miami Dermatology and Laser Institute, tells SELF that genetics is a big factor. And, she adds, just like with teenage acne, hormones can also play a role in the adult version.

Day says she’s seen patients develop cystic acne when they go on or off the Pill, or otherwise change contraceptives. (For those who develop acne after they stop using hormonal birth control, Day says the BC may simply have been masking what was already there, so once a person stops using it, the acne pops up again.)

Your body's immune response may also be a factor, Waibel says—depending on the way your body fights infection, the worse your acne may be.

Diet can also play a role, which is why Goldenberg talks to his adult acne patients about what they eat. He usually recommends that patients go off dairy or use organic dairy products. Non-organic milk is often produced by cows that are given steroids, hormones, and antibiotics—all of which can throw your normal hormonal balance out of whack, causing or exacerbating acne.

Typically, doctors will try a few treatments before resorting to Accutane, which Day says is one of the most “reliable and powerful drugs we use.” However, Accutane isn’t recommended for long-term use and has been linked to birth defects in babies born to women who use it during pregnancy, so it's not for everyone.

Dermatologists also use spironolactone, a medication designed to treat high blood pressure. When given in low doses, it can help block hormonal receptors that trigger acne. Patients typically have to be on it for a few months before they see results, but Day says that it helps clear up acne in the vast majority of women. “It makes me a hero every time,” she says.

If you develop adult cystic acne, you shouldn’t panic—but you should make an appointment with your dermatologist ASAP. “As you get older, the chances of scarring from cystic acne goes up,” Day says. “Go see a dermatologist right away and get your treatment options.”