

SELF

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Lena Dunham Is Not Happy That She Suddenly Has Rosacea

The condition may make a surprise appearance in your 30s.



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Lena Dunham has been pretty candid when it comes to her health, repeatedly opening up in public about her struggles with both [endometriosis](#) and [ovarian cysts](#). Now, the *Girls* co-creator is talking about her struggle with a new health issue: [rosacea](#).

In an essay on [Lenny Letter](#), the 31-year-old reveals that she was recently diagnosed with the chronic skin condition, which has been a serious blow to her confidence. "Seven years of being treated in the public eye like a punch line about female imperfection may not have felt like it was wearing me down," she wrote, "but it had actually forced me to rely emotionally on my one area of fully conventional beauty: my perfect fucking skin." she wrote. When Dunham received negative comments about her appearance, she consoled herself by focusing on her gorgeous complexion, she continued.

"But chronic illness—endometriosis, along with an accompanying autoimmune disease that gives me chronic joint pain and fatigue—has made my body far less predictable to me, and in far more frightening ways than whether I'll wake up able to fit into my high-waisted jeans," she wrote. "And a few weeks ago, a course of steroids to treat a massive flare of joint pain and instability led to rosacea's appearing overnight, making me look like a scary Victorian doll, two perfect pink circles painted on her porcelain face."

Dunham says her rosacea eventually became "hundreds of tiny pimple-blisters that covered me from forehead to neck," which left her feeling "terror, rage, and piteous sadness."

Rosacea is a chronic skin disorder that usually appears on the face and goes through periods of flare-ups and remissions, according to the National Rosacea Society. And it's actually a relatively common condition, affecting more than 14 million people in the U.S., according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD).

But not everyone has the same experience with rosacea. In fact, there are four subtypes of the condition, New York City dermatologist Doris Day, M.D., author of *100 Questions and Answers About Acne*, tells SELF. There's one that causes facial redness (erythematotelangiectatic rosacea), one that causes redness with bumps and pimples (papulopustular rosacea), another that causes skin thickening around the nose (phymatous rosacea), and then there's ocular rosacea, which causes dry eye, tearing and burning, and swollen eyelids.

It's not uncommon to suddenly develop rosacea in your 30s—even if you had flawless skin before.

It's easy to think that you're done with acne-like skin issues after your teens, but most people with rosacea develop it between the ages of 30 and 50, according to the AAD. However, it can show up even earlier than that: Kally Papantoniou, M.D., with Advanced Dermatology P.C., tells SELF that she's seen a few rosacea patients who are in their 20s.

Genetics usually predispose a person to rosacea, Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF, but other triggers usually spark the initial breakout. Those triggers can include stress, sun exposure, and spicy foods, he says. Topical and oral steroids can also cause a rosacea breakout, Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, tells SELF.

As Dunham mentions, having another chronic illness may indirectly make rosacea more likely thanks to the stress it can cause, Dr. Papantoniou says. And, although coffee and alcohol don't cause rosacea on their own, they can make it worse or trigger flare-ups, she says.

Once you have rosacea, you can't get rid of it. But there are ways to help keep flare-ups under control.

The first step in dealing with rosacea is figuring out your triggers—and avoiding them as much as possible, Dr. Day says. Everyone has their own set of triggers, she explains. And some may be unexpected (e.g. vinegar or wasabi), so you might have to play detective a little bit.

Although rosacea can't be cured, there are several ways to keep it under control. For instance, you can try a low dose of the oral antibiotic doxycycline or a topical antibiotic called metronidazole says Dr. Day. In addition, laser treatments can help decrease skin redness, Dr. Goldenberg says, and they may even lead to fewer breakouts in the future. Dr. Zeichner also suggests using a gentle skin cleanser and moisturizers to help repair the outer skin layer.

So if you do suspect that you're suffering from rosacea, you don't have to deal with it on your own. "There's so much we can do to help control it," Dr. Day says—even if it snuck up on you.