

Examining the Emotional Impact of Acne in a Virtual World



Acne patients are working hard to conceal their acne on Zoom.

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>> When the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year, life for everyone was turned upside down. With schools closed and workplaces shuttered, teens and young adults turned to doing most everything—living, attending school, working, and socializing—online through the lens of a computer camera. Transitioning to a virtual world has been difficult for many, and even more so for teenagers and young adults with acne, according to a new survey.¹ Studies have shown that acne, which affects approximately 85 percent of those between ages 12 and 24 in the United States,² often causes self-esteem to plummet and is associated with depression, anxiety, poor self-image, and a decreased quality of life.³

The digital world is greatly affecting the way many people with acne are living their lives during the age of social distancing, taking a toll on their emotional health, and preventing them from fully participating in their digital lives. However, teens and young adults with acne are more likely to turn to dermatologists for skincare solutions as a result of increased video calling, according to the survey. With innovations in acne treatment, we now have options to offer teens and young adults with facial and truncal acne who have become hyperaware of their acne in this new age.

IMPACT OF ACNE IN TODAY'S DIGITAL WORLD

The online survey, conducted in December 2020 among 2,000 nationally representative US consumers ages 14 to 29 suffering from facial and truncal acne, was developed by Galderma Laboratories, LP in collaboration with Wakefield Research. Results showed that, with professional and educational environments moving into a digital reality, two-thirds (66 percent) of people with acne said they are spending more time video calling than they were before the pandemic, including a third (34 percent) who are spending an hour or more each day. Acne patients are losing time, feeling insecure, and working hard to con-

ceal their acne to feel camera-ready. Among people with acne in their 20s, 50 percent reported they feel anxiety if someone insists on a video call, as do 44 percent of their younger peers. As a result, 69 percent of people aged 21 to 29 with acne who use video calls spend time planning or worrying about their appearance. Survey respondents reported spending an average of 22 minutes thinking about and planning their appearance before a video call. Eight in 10 reported they would choose outfits specifically that cover up body acne when they have a video chat or in-person meeting.

Even when they feel camera-ready, acne is still hindering young people from fully participating in their virtual environments. The overwhelming majority (86 percent) of those surveyed reported having missed what others are

acne by the numbers

50% Proportion of 20-somethings with acne who reported anxiety if someone insists on a video call

22 Mins. Avg. time that 20-somethings with acne spend thinking about/planning appearance for video calls

8 in 10 Number of survey respondents who choose outfits specifically that cover up body acne when they have a video chat or in-person meeting

62% Proportion of survey respondents who opt to turn their cameras off during video calls

64% Proportion of survey respondents more likely to see a dermatologist now that they are doing more video calls



“ The overwhelming majority of those surveyed reported having missed what others are saying on a video call because they are distracted by assessing how they look on video.”

saying on a video call because they are distracted by assessing how they look on video, and that’s if they even turn the camera on at all. More than half (62 percent) said they opt to turn their cameras off during video calls. Of those who have had a video call for work since the start of the pandemic, 58 percent reported they have faked a technical glitch or made up an excuse to avoid turning their camera on because of their acne. More than three in five young professionals who have had a video call (62 percent) reported that their acne has hindered their professional growth. Half of students with acne (50 percent) said it has had a negative impact on their grades and academic achievement. Overall, eight in 10 people with acne said they avoid posting pictures/videos of themselves on social media when experiencing an acne breakout.

However, the digital age also has inspired people with acne to take action. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of those who were surveyed reported they are more likely to see a dermatologist now that they are doing more video calls. With the increasing use of telehealth appointments,

it is easier than ever for patients to connect with dermatologists. In my practice, we have been using telehealth successfully for patients with acne, especially teens, as they are familiar with the technology and find virtual visits to be convenient and flexible. It’s not only teens, though. I have seen an increase in adult-onset acne in my practice, particularly in young women in their 20s, who are juggling virtual school and online dating or trying to start their careers and are upset that they are having to deal with something they thought was a condition that only affects teens.

For patients with both facial and truncal acne, we have the option of treating them with Akliief (trifarotene) Cream, 0.005%, the first retinoid molecule to be approved by the FDA in more than 20 years for the once-daily topical treatment of acne vulgaris. It is also the first topical retinoid treatment specifically studied and proven safe and effective in treating both facial and truncal acne.⁴ Phase 3 clinical trial results showed that Akliief Cream significantly reduced inflammatory lesions as early as two weeks on the face and four weeks on the chest, shoulders, and back compared to vehicle ($p < 0.05$).⁵ The most common reported treatment-emergent adverse events were pain, dryness, discoloration, and rash at the application site.

EMPOWERING TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH ACNE

There is a powerful connection between acne and self-confidence, and many teens and young adults with acne experience a significant burden beyond the physical impact of the condition. The survey results clearly show that the impact of acne can be magnified by the technology that teens and young adults have come to rely on. Given today’s increasingly digital-focused world and the resulting increase of seeing oneself on screen, this patient group is more concerned than ever about having clearer skin. They want to be able to focus less on their acne and more on the pivotal moments in their lives, so dermatologists can take this opportunity to discuss a treatment plan and empower our patients when it comes to the management of their skin health. By utilizing a next-generation acne treatment, we can help patients achieve clearer skin, which may help them feel confident, both on and off camera. ■

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1. Galderma Laboratories L.P. Data on File. Wakefield Research AKLIEF Cream Survey Raw Data Readout. December 2020.

2. American Academy of Dermatology Association. Skin conditions by the numbers. Acne. <https://www.aad.org/media/stats/conditions>. Accessed March 16, 2021.

3. American Academy of Dermatology Association. Acne can affect more than your skin. <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/acne-and-rosacea/emotional-health-effects-of-acne>. Accessed March 16, 2021.

4. Galderma Laboratories L.P. Data on File

5. Tan J, Thiboutot D, Popp G, et al. Randomized phase 3 evaluation of trifarotene 50µg/g cream treatment of moderate facial and truncal acne. *J Am Acad Dermatol*. 2019;80:1691-1699. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2019.02.044>.