There are some things about being a teenager that cannot be changed: school, parents, heartbreak. And, until recently, skin. Teenagers are famous for having bad skin, and it seems incredibly unfair that these emotional-rollercoaster years should so often be accompanied by shiny foreheads, dry cheeks and pulsing zits – all that confusion and anxiety manifesting externally.

There is a biological reason for the eight years of pus. Both oestrogen and testosterone shoot up during puberty, but it's the spike in androgens (a group of hormones that includes testosterone) that causes the sudden surge in oil production, inflammation and the build-up of keratin (dead skin protein).

'It's hard for teenagers,' says dermatologist Dr Anjali Mahto. 'Many are told, “Spots are normal at your age, just sit it out.” As a result, 20 per cent suffer from severe acne scarring.' A recent survey conducted by the British Skin Foundation says that 60 per cent of 10-to-18-year-olds with acne have been bullied because of it. 'Acne can have a huge impact on a teenager's confidence and quality of life,' says dermatologist Dr Stefanie Williams. 'A lot of teens don't even know that help is available. A host of new treatments mean that bad skin is no longer inevitable. At 23MD clinic, teenage acne is treated by photodynamic therapy (PDT), from £100. A photosensitising cream is applied to the face and, once absorbed, is activated by a specific wavelength of light, producing a reactive oxygen that kills Propionibacterium acnes (the bacteria that cause pimples). The results are impressive, with an 82 per cent reduction in spots in just three sessions. Another option, light therapy, blitzes bacteria (using blue light) and reduces inflammation (using red light). At the Light Salon at Harvey Nichols, you sit in a cozy armchair under what looks like a giant lamp while different-coloured light-emitting diodes (LEDs) beam away at your skin. The Express LED Acne Treatment, £35, takes 15 minutes – and there's a 20 per cent discount if you're under 20 years old. For best results, 10 sessions spread over three to five weeks are suggested.

Mild chemical peels can also help, and those that contain glycolic acid (found in sugarcane) not only reduce the amount of oil that your skin produces but also help to diminish scarring. Laser treatment can be used as well, and Mahto is a fan of the N-Lite laser, or 'yellow-light laser' (thought to be gentler than red or blue light), from £150, which neutralises P. acnes and aids the toning down of redness. The skin does heat up during the treatment and will look a bit pink immediately afterwards, but this disappears after about an hour. It takes around 20 minutes to treat the full face, and a minimum of three sessions, one month apart, is recommended.

Though 'topical treatments are not a one-off, they're a holding measure,' says Mahto. 'They don't tend to work well on the back or shoulders, where the skin is much thicker. If you have acne on more than one body site, you're probably looking at needing medication. Some dermatologists prescribe the contraceptive pill, which works by raising levels of progesterone and oestrogen. This lowers androgens and does have a notable impact on the skin (though there is no equivalent anti-androgen treatment for boys). Yasmin is still the most commonly prescribed and does not have the side effects (such as deep vein thrombosis and blood clots) associated with the previously frequently prescribed Diane365.

Skin antibiotics are another option. Lymecycline stops bacteria in the skin from multiplying and spreading (though Mahto warns that antibiotics should not be taken for more than three months as they can be harmful to your gut, and the body can build up an immunity). Once the infection has been brought under control, it means you are also more likely to respond to prescription creams, such as Skincare (acetic acid, which reduces keratin build-up) or retinoids (like tretinoin,
which stops pores from clogging). Medications found at the punchier end of the spectrum include Roaccutane (isotretinoin, which works by reducing the skin’s ability to produce oil). Roaccutane isn’t new, but the way that it is now being prescribed is. Williams puts those teens who come to see her on a half-daily dose (or even less) of the amount recommended. Yes, it means that you’ll be on the medication for eight months instead of four, but gone are those nasty side effects (flaky skin, chapped lips, dry eyes). It should also be noted that the much-publicised links to low mood and poor mental health have been ruled out.

‘Recent meta-analysis has concluded that there is absolutely no connection at all between Roaccutane and depression in teenagers,’ says Williams. Which makes sense. If your skin looks better, the chances are good that you are going to feel better too. Most patients notice that their skin begins to clear in two to three months. ‘It’s only the medication that can switch acne off for good,’ says Williams.

Mahlo has also been known to try patients on something called Spironolactone, an anti-androgen, ‘though it’s an off-label medication and not licensed in the UK for acne’. (It is, however, licensed for the treatment of blood pressure and heart failure, and is safe for use in young, fit, healthy females.) ‘The oil glands shrink, the pores do not get blocked, inflammation doesn’t occur,’ says Mahlo. It is particularly effective in girls who have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), in which an unusually high level of testosterone causes side effects such as irregular periods, spots and excess facial and body hair.

None of these are overnight cures – but they will make a difference, and we are, we hope, moving towards a time when acne will just be a distant, unsightly memory.

FRANKIE BALDWIN, 16

There was no defining moment when I suddenly became aware of my skin. The self-consciousness develops gradually, and a lot of the insecurity is inside our heads. But it still doesn’t make you feel great. I have really dry skin. It can become irritated and hot, sometimes feeling like it’s crawling with insects. Only an antihistamine calms it. Many products make my skin feel worse. Even sensitive ranges are often filled with chemicals and perfumes that inflame my skin. My parents suggested I start washing my face with unscented soap and water, which at least stopped it from itching.

Then I had my first ever facial — and it turned out my parents knew nothing. Abigail James explained that skin has an acidic outer layer and that soap is alkaline, so rubbing it on my face wrecked my skin’s pH balance. She also noticed the tiny bumps on my jaw and the backs of my arms, called Keratosis pilaris. Common in dry skin, it occurs when keratin accumulates in the follicles. Abigail advises ‘KP victims’ to avoid hot showers and to apply vitamin E oil. I also now wash my face with Gallinée La Culture Foaming Facial Cleanser, £14, which leaves my skin supple. La Roche-Posay Waterproof Eye Make-up Remover, £11, has been a revelation. And Less Facial Oil for dry skin, £60, makes everything feel super-soft.

It’s not a total transformation. When I look in the mirror, I see the same face staring back. But my skin is fresher and I feel better about myself. The truth is that we spend so much time thinking about what’s going on with our own skin that we fail to pay attention to anyone else’s. Or maybe there are more important things for us to worry about.

MARGOT PAISNER, 13

I started getting spots at the beginning of the summer. It wasn’t acne exactly, more like a spray of tiny bumps across my forehead. In some lights, the bumps weren’t noticeable, but under the LED strips in our school bathrooms, or in broad daylight in the car mirror, they were really obvious. It didn’t make me feel great.

My spots got me down all the time. I would miss dates with friends and parties. I’d cover my spots with my hand when I was talking to people and chop the top off my forehead on Instagram posts. The problem is that everyone has different advice. Some girls at school suggested Sudocream, so I slathered that on my forehead every night. Other girls used a range of things like tea tree oil, Nivea, Simple, Neutrogena and Dermalogica. I tried most of them. I also did mud packs twice a week. I went onto the internet to watch facial tutorials and started using a scrub, three facial washes, a toner, salicylic-acid pads and, finally, pore strips. But my spots only got worse.

I went to see Facialist Nataliya Robinson. She asked me questions about my diet and bowel movements(). She examined my skin under a bright lamp and told me that it was in good condition but I was stripping it of natural oils with all my scrubs and masks. She rubbed my face with some chamomile-tea-infused cotton pads and squeezed some of my larger spots. She finished off with an aloe vera mask, and gave me a little bottle of ‘magic’ herb powder and two moisturisers to take home. I used that with an amazingly nice Tata Harper Purifying Cleanser and Toner, from £55.

My skin is definitely better – everyone has noticed. And I will never use a pore strip again.

THE SPOTBUSTERS

DR STEFANIE WILLIAMS
Dermatologist
The stylish Eavelle clinic’s Dr Williams offers dermatology advice and her Dermatology at a Glance book. Grade Acne Facial for teenagers, which involves an important extraction of blocked pores, blue-light therapy (to kill bacteria) and a glycolic peel. A course of acne facials will keep the skin free of spots. Consultation, £250. Eavelle. 020 7250 0160.
edels.co.uk

DR ANJALI MAHTO
Dermatologist
Dr Mahlo is sympathetic to acne, frequently suffering from spots herself. She is happy to talk to teenagers she uses her Instagram for tips on how to deal with them. She is easy to talk to and often prescribes peels or laser before trying you on antibiotics. She also tests treatments on herself. ‘I think it reassures teenagers,’ she says. Consultation, £250. cadoganclinic.co.uk

DR DAVID JACK
Aesthetic Doctor
Surgery Dr David Jack has a special interest in skin and acne. He uses his Theraclear Acne Treatment, employing suction to lift the skin, plus intense pulsed light (IPL) to kill bacteria. The result? Sebum glands produce less oil. He also has a very soothing presence. Theraclear Acne Treatment, £125 per session; six sessions recommended. drdavidjack.com

ABIGAIL JAMES
Facialist
Former Liz Earle ambassador. Abigail is wonderfully empathetic. Her treatments (at home or from the Beaumont Spa) are simple and straightforward, and the products she uses are natural or organic (so sensitive skin won’t flare up). She also writes a very good blog in which she advises you on at-home skincare, nutrition and wellbeing. Facial, from £35. abigailjames.com

KATHERINE JACKSON
Facialist
Katherine works from an Aludon’s of skincare in Fulham, commingled with lotions and masks she mixes herself. Her hyaluronic-acid gel relieves tight, dehydrated skin, while careful steam extractions leave your complexion clean and clear. She also does energy healing, which will make you feel really relaxed. Bespoke Facial, £180. katherinjackson.co.uk

NATALIYA ROBINSON
Facialist
Straight-talking Nataliya believes in natural ingredients. Her Teen Skin Facial combines a gentle ‘green peel’ made from nettles (to dissolve dead skin cells) with gentle extraction and high frequency (an electric current to kill germs and sterile spots). She also treats breakouts on the back with enzyme peels and LED light. Teen Skin Facial, from £110; back treatment, £180. nataliyrobinson.co.uk