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How to Stop Touching Your Face and Picking at Your Acne

BY SARAH KINONEN | JUNE 23, 2017

Hi, I'm Sarah, and I'm a big face-toucher. In times of stress (slash all the time), I can most likely be found with my hand looming near my chin, cheek, or forehead. Sometimes, depending on where I am, that touching quickly escalates to picking and popping, but that's another story. My tick, which may actually be a sign of obsessive-compulsive disorder, says **Ava Shamban**, a Beverly Hills-based dermatologist, isn't out of the ordinary. "Any kind of repetitive behavior can be a sign of a mild form of OCD," explains Shamban. "In other words, people do it as a reflex without any conscious control."



The trouble with continuously touching your face is that, along with potentially smudging your makeup, you're essentially transferring dirt and bacteria from your hands to your visage, which can lead to dirty, clogged pores, says Elizabeth Tanzi, founder and director of Capital Laser & Skin Care and associate clinical professor, department of dermatology at the George Washington University Medical Center in Washington, D.C. "There are a lot of chemicals and irritants that get on our hands all day long that don't belong on the face," says Tanzi. "All the oils and debris on the hands and fingers can clog pores, which can lead to breakouts."

Luckily, there are a few tricks to stop the incessant contact. The first step, says Shamban, is to realize that you're doing it — and then take measures to stop. "Sometimes it can be as easy as just realizing this fact," she says. "Other times, you can substitute another behavior instead, like brushing your teeth, flossing your teeth, or doing a yoga pose."

And if you're a picker, meaning you tend to mindlessly poke and prod at your skin's imperfections — an act more damaging than transferring dirt and bacteria — you're actually disrupting the barrier of the skin, which "allows bacteria that is normally present on the skin to penetrate to a deeper level, leading to a breakout," says Tanzi. Plus, there's a bigger risk for scarring when you pick, which can do more damage in the long run. Breaking this habit is obviously more difficult than touching, which is why, in some cases, Shamban says oral medication may be necessary to help reset the brain.

If you believe your touching habits are more serious than the occasional skin graze, you may want to make an appointment with a dermatologist and/or medical professional for more help.

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