



# MEN'S JOURNAL

## How to Pop a Pimple (and When to Leave Your Face Alone)

By Adam Hurley



Technically, you aren't supposed to pop any of them on your own, advises **Anna Guanche,** M.D., board-certified dermatologist and celebrity beauty expert. It's something you should let your own board-certified dermatologist handle, or minimize with a good at-home skincare regimen. But—doctor's advice aside—some of us are obviously still going to pop at home. So what's the least destructive way to proceed?

We got a few suggestions on the matter from Guanche, reticent as she is to advise any at-home popping. Before we get into that, it feels necessary to shed light on one frequent cause of acne, particularly for gym-goers: "Whey protein has been linked with an onset of acne," Guanche says. "Physically active men who are breaking out should take a look at their protein powder."

### How to Know if a Pimple Is Safe to Pop

Again, because we have to say it, try to avoid picking at your skin. "Popping pimples is known to lead to lifelong scarring and more acne," says Guanche. But if you must, here's a breakdown of types of pimples, along with their poppability.

### Never, Ever Pop:

"Undergrounders or cystic acne should never be touched," Guanche stresses. This is the one hard rule—do not even touch them. "They can worsen with the intense pressure, and will often lead to a 'backwards volcano eruption.'" Secondly, she adds that inflammatory papules or



slightly raised red bumps on the skin should also never be popped, since nothing is going to come out. You're just going to add unnecessary pressure and harm the skin.

Proceed With Caution:

"Blackheads should only be squeezed out under steam, and in a clean environment," says Guanche. (And, ideally, by a professional.)

While popping whiteheads seems obvious—that raised, white or yellow pustule is just begging for a squeeze!—Guanche says it's risky since dermatologists require a blade "to create an opening for the keratin to come out." By popping it on your own, you risk scarring and creating even more acne by doing so.

How to Properly Pop a Pimple

Guanche (still reticent about any at-home popping), says that if the pimple has a white pustule and you plan to pop it, then first take a warm shower to loosen it up. "After the shower, apply a gentle cloth to both sides of the pimple and push slightly downward, with gentle pressure instead of pushing your fingers together." She says that if you push your fingers together, sometimes you can cause additional irritation to the surrounding skin, which could lead to a red or dark scar.

After popping, dab on a small amount of antibiotic ointment and let it heal in peace.

Why You Shouldn't Pop Prematurely

"When a pimple is popped, it leads to keratin (the protein that clogs pores) moving further down into the skin, and the skin doesn't like this," Guanche says. "The keratin is seen by the immune system, and heavy inflammation sets in." Now you've got even worse problems.

How to Heal Pimples—Without Popping

Leave a pimple alone? Impossible, you say. But really, resist the urge to burst that baby open, and if it's persistent or powerful or painful, then book an appointment with your board-certified dermo right away. In the meantime, Guanche suggests a warm compress and a dot of over-the-counter hydrocortisone to help reduce inflammation and heal the pimple.

The Best Way to Prevent Pimples

If you don't want to deal with any of this, then double down on your skincare regimen. Guanche says this is the best way to avoid acne all together: "See your board-certified



dermatologist for a regimen that may include certain topical prescriptions. This regimen should also include a cleanser, sunscreen, and moisturizer. Check out the ultimate skin regimen .we got from a handful of board-certified dermatologists.

Guanche says to visit your board-certified dermatologist if your pimple is any of the following: huge, extremely tender, near the eye socket, or if the skin around the pimple is also reddened. “Your doctor may be able to offer a kenalog injection (a cortisone/steroid shot to reduce inflammation). This could help your symptoms in less than 24 hours.”

#### When to See a Dermatologist

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