

AcnePSP Question and Answer

QUESTION: What are the risks of picking and popping spots?

Many web sites and magazine articles warn that picking and popping spots is not a good idea. They are right. However, it is an almost irresistible temptation to squeeze some types of spot, typically pustules or yellow-heads and black-heads. NEVER be tempted to squeeze other types of spot such as whiteheads and papules or ones that are deep within the skin. The pore (opening on the skin surface) is so tiny that you cannot squeeze out the contents without damaging your skin. You can also rupture the tiny hair follicle canal so that all the nasty gunk within it will be forced into the deeper layers of your skin where it will trigger more inflammation making the spot redder and more obvious than it was before.

If you know that you will succumb to temptation and squeeze pustules or blackheads, make sure that you wash your hands thoroughly ideally with an antibacterial cleanser or gel before touching your spots. Afterwards, apply a small amount of benzoyl peroxide or antiseptic to the spot and then leave it alone. For a few pounds, you can buy a comedo extractor from a chemist or online retailer. This is a much better way of removing blackheads than with your fingers. If you buy a stainless steel one, you can sterilise it in boiling water or with alcohol after each use. From puberty onwards, many people have prominent pores on their noses which can retain trapped hairs making them look like lots of blackheads. They are not! Don't be tempted to try and 'extract' these as they will simply fill up again. The adhesive on pore strips is generally not strong enough to remove blackheads.

No one has ever conducted a study to find out whether picking or popping spots makes them heal faster or more likely to scar. If you squeeze your spots with dirty hands, you will almost certainly increase the risk of infecting them with non-skin bacteria.