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Why Your Pores Look So Damn Huge

Let us magnify what's not obvious:

Five surprising reasons those little buggers can seem like craters—plus how to tighten 'em up ASAP.

By Genevieve Monsma



HONESTLY: HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO

to change the look of your pores? According to a Harris Poll/L'Oréal survey, 56 percent of women would give up booze, dessert, even social media (#firstworldpores) for an entire year to downsize those eyesores. The national obsession has reached such a fervor, dermatologists even coined the term “porexia”—which is exactly what it sounds like.

Buzzy names aside, there's unfortunately still no miracle treatment to permanently shrink the suckers. (Get on it, derms!) Of course, regular exfoliation helps make them look smaller (clogged pores = large pores). But we've discovered a few unexpected reasons why they could be freaking out—in some cases, at the hands of the products used to fight them. So, if any of the following five things describe you, find the smart fix that'll help you whittle your pores...and have your merlot (or whiskey, or Hoegaarden), too.

You're not zealous enough about sunscreen.

Not to rub your nose in it—actually, we might have to do just that. “The skin on your nose often has a higher degree of sun damage, which can make pores—already prominent in that area—appear coarser,” says Adam Geyer, M.D., a New York City dermatologist. And since the T-zone is slick, SPF tends to rub off more easily there. Solved: **Shiseido Sun Protection Cream SPF 50+ with WetForce Technology (\$38, shiseido.com)** is formulated to latch on to skin more fiercely in the presence of sweat.

Shop!
+

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You're still not using retinoids.

Really, guys? They're the headliners of the anti-aging world for the bang-up job they do at stimulating collagen production—which, turns out, is just as crucial for pores. When pores aren't supported by collagen, "they become lax, the skin sags, and pores look enlarged," says David Bank, M.D., a dermatologist in Mount Kisco, New York. (Retinoids also exfoliate, making them a double whammy for pores.) Start with an over-the-counter retinol and apply three times a week before bed; try **Neutrogena Pore Refining Moisturizer (\$15, at drugstores)**. If you have sensitive skin that's irritated by retinol, use a chemical exfoliant (like glycolic acid) to gently unplug, then chase it with a



product that tightens the skin around pore openings, such as **Kiehl's Dermatologist Solutions Precision Lifting & Pore Tightening Concentrate (\$64, kiehls.com)**. It uses micro-filtered yeast extract and geranium essential oil to firm.

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You can't get enough extractions.

Facials can clear out pores—if done by the right hands. “Make sure the aesthetician is cleaning out only the clogged pores—not every pore,” says Macrene Alexiades-Armenakas, M.D., Ph.D., a New York City dermatologist and consultant for Lancôme. “If you manipulate those that don’t need extraction, they may stretch out permanently.” Traumatized pores can develop scar tissue that creates an indentation deeper than the pore itself, adds Sonia Batra, M.D., M.P.H., a clinical assistant professor of dermatology at the USC Keck School of Medicine.

Between facial appointments, de-gunk pores (so your skin requires fewer extractions in the first place!) by using an exfoliating cleanser—we like **Laura Mercier Flawless Skin Face Polish (\$32, lauramercier.com)**—or a cleansing brush, such as the **Foreo Luna T-Sonic Cleansing and Anti-Aging System (\$200, sephora.com)**, which dislodges dirt and dead cells with pulsing silicone bristles.

Shop!
+**4 You had acne as a teen.**

Big whoop. Everyone did. Problem is, the enlarged sebaceous glands that caused them way back when may have never properly shrunk, “even if you’re no longer producing a lot of oil,” explains Elizabeth Hale, M.D., an associate clinical professor of dermatology at New York University Langone Medical Center. So if three months of topical treatments have done jack, in-office photodynamic therapy (PDT) could be the answer. A photosensitizing solution penetrates pores for an hour, then a blue light is directed at them for up to 10 minutes. Most patients require three to five sessions (at about \$500 a pop), spaced two to four weeks apart. A major caveat: The skin will look and feel sunburned for a few days post-treatment.

5 You’re wearing makeup to hide them—but it’s actually enhancing them.

Powders may settle into those bitty holes over the course of the day, making them appear larger. Alexiades-Armenakas says she has also seen instances in which mica or talc has become caught inside a pore, enlarging it for good. (Yikes!) Before applying makeup, put on a primer to seal your pores, suggests Batra. Try **L’Oréal Paris RevitaLift Miracle Blur (\$25, at drugstores)**.

DO PORES REALLY OPEN AND CLOSE?

No, they don’t have the necessary muscles to expand and constrict, says dermatologist Adam Geyer, M.D. What you’re seeing is the pore moving between a clear state and a clogged one. Over a matter of hours, the pore can also darken—just as a fruit does when exposed to oxygen.