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9 Myths You Probably Believe About Your Pores

Want to know the truth?

By Liz Ritter, Executive Editor · Aug 4, 2021



So many products and treatments come along with the pitch of permanently shrinking, diminishing and making **pores** look nonexistent—a very attractive promise to anyone who struggles with their size. But totally erasing the look of pores for the long haul isn't really a reality. "No matter what you do, you can't permanently change the size of your pores," says Fort Lauderdale, FL dermatologist **Dr. Matthew Elias**. "Pore size is mostly determined at birth by genetics. If your parents have large pores likely you will, too, but you can minimize the appearance of pores by combinations of treatments and topicals."

Myth 1: You can permanently shrink your pores.

Unfortunately, this one is false. “No product can permanently **shrink** pores,” says Washington, D.C., dermatologist Elizabeth Tanzi, MD. “But, there are some very effective products out there that do a good job at temporarily making them look more refined.” Los Gatos, CA, dermatologist **Steven L. Swengel, MD**, adds that, in his opinion, the best topical agent for making pores look better is the nightly use of topical retinoids or **retinols**. “These products do two things: They increase epidermal turnover, thus improving the overall thickness of the skin, and increase the purging of oily plugs from the pores—the less packed the pores are, the smaller they look.” Davie, FL dermatologist **Marianna Blyumin-Karasik, MD** agrees and stands by one specific serum: “Skin Better Alpha Ret Clearing Serum is a perfect synergy of pore shrinkage because it has retinoids, AHA lactic acid and BHA salicylic acid.”



And if you're really, really obsessed with how your pores look, consider this sage thought: “I'm always amazed at how many patients complain about their own pores, yet I've never seen anyone comment about anyone else's pores,” New York dermatologist **Doris Day, MD**, says. “It's something we see in ourselves, and usually only in a highly magnified mirror.”

Myth 2: In-office treatments can erase pores.

If you do have a pore problem, your best bet is tackling it with in-office options, but again, having realistic expectations, as well as doing these treatments consistently, is crucial. “The **Clear + Brilliant laser**, which helps boost collagen and ‘build up’ the skin around pores, has been shown to provide good long-term reduction for pores, but nothing is permanent,” Dr. Tanzi says. “Maintenance treatments need to be performed to keep up the improvement.” And Dr. Swengel adds that it's smart to look at any in-office treatment geared toward pores as something that is amplifying and improving the cleansing of sebaceous debris, and not a magic wand that is automatically going to erase them. “A favorite treatment in our office is use of the **SilkPeel** Diamond Dermalinfusion treatment, which is a combination of microdermabrasion under variable suction. The debris is literally swept and pulled out of the follicular pores.” Dr. Day's pick: Isolaz, which she says does a great job at going in and purifying pores.



Myth 3: You can “open” and “close” pores.

“A lot of talk has always centered around use of heat, cold, steam, egg whites, avocado and the like as it relates to pores,” Dr. Swengel says. “All of these are temporary and provide no long-term improvement, as they are effectively hydrating and swelling the skin for a limited time.” So why is this an essential step of a facial? “Steam does help sort of ‘soften’ pores for that second, but it’s not a long-term fix,” Dr. Day says. “The benefit: After your skin is soft and hydrated, you can apply a salicylic acid peel to help exfoliate deep into the pore and then top off with a cool rinse and hyaluronic acid moisturizer. The result will be radiant skin.”



Myth 4: Pores get larger with age.

The surprising truth: Pores actually enlarge in most people when they reach puberty! As Dr. Swengel explains, pore size is genetic and declares itself over time. “Pore size starts out quite small when we are children, but enlarge on most of us when we reach puberty. In our younger years, pores are surrounded by a fairly robust ‘cuff’ of dermal collagen that keeps their size fairly consistent. With age, that dermal ‘cuff’ of collagen thins out and decreases in size, thus allowing the pores to relax, open a bit more and become larger in appearance. The sebaceous contents of pores can be more robust in some individuals, thus giving them an appearance of larger pores.” But consider this: If we didn’t have pores, we wouldn’t be able to let out to let out any of this sebum, which would result in incredibly dry, cracked skin.



Myth 5: Exfoliating can change your pore size—both positively and negatively.

“Some people are prone to large pores because of skin type, but for others, pores can increase due to skin conditions such as rosacea or too much sun damage,” Dr. Tanzi says. “It’s actually not that common for people to develop large pores due to poor exfoliating, they would really have to almost never wash their face for this to happen.” Either way, any type of exfoliation should be kept at a reasonable level. “I don’t see pores being affected too much by errors in exfoliation, but I do see increased redness and erythema due to repeated injury to



our skin's natural barrier layers," Dr. Swengel says. "Skin that never sees any exfoliation nor use of any topical active products tends to slow down in turnover and becomes more thin and atrophic in appearance."

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Myth 6: Blackheads are an obvious sign your pores are clogged.

This is probably the most misunderstood pore myth out there. "Many people think the black dots on their nose are clogged pores or blackheads," Dr. Day says. "They are, in fact, mostly fine hairs, or sebaceous filaments, which are a combination of sebum and skin cells. It's different from blackheads because those are formed from an actual obstruction of the follicular opening, while sebaceous filaments are more common and often normally found in the nose because this is an area with more active sebaceous glands." Another misconception? Dr. Days says you can't get rid of these filaments and no amount of squeezing helps, but you can control them a bit with glycolic and salicylic acid products and gentle exfoliation.



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Myth 7: The sun will successfully shrink your pores.

Hoping a few minutes in the sun will dry up acne and help out with your pores? Think again. "In reality, sun exposure dries the water out of your skin, and that can make your oil glands work overtime to produce sebum to help hold water in your skin," Dr. Day says. "Because the oil glands live at the base of your pores, sun exposure can actually make your pores bigger." In fact, Louisville, KY, dermatologist **Tami Buss Cassis, MD** says her trifecta for improving the appearance of pores, includes the staple: "We love sunscreens, retinoids and microneedling for pore size!"



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Myth 8: Pores are an “ailment.”

Bloomfield Hills, MI dermatologist **Linda C. Honet, MD** says this is the top pore myth she'd like to give a positive spin to: “Pores are part of the normal anatomy of skin. In truth, the real ailment is the 10X mirror! More often than not, pores are rarely visible to the naked eye, unless someone is uncomfortably close to your face to see them. You're more likely to first feel their hot breath on you than to notice their pores!” Plus, she points out, a pore is the normal opening to the skin's pilosebaceous unit, where hair follicles and oil and sweat glands reside, and it's how the skin moisturizes itself and helps to thermoregulate our body (so, yes, you need them!).



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Myth 9: Vaseline clogs the pores.

New York dermatologist **Jody Levine, MD** says she hears this one a lot, but it is simply not true. “**Vaseline** (\$2) is actually noncomedogenic, meaning it does not clog pores. And if rubbed in on top of moist skin, is one of my favorite moisturizers.” Another favorite on Dr. Levine's list: The PicoSure laser, which she specifically uses for the treatment of pores. “PicoSure laser tightens and smoothens the skin to reduce pore size and the damage caused by aging, sun exposure or smoking in as little as four treatments spaced out two-to-four weeks apart, without any downtime. The laser continues to work for six months after your last treatment to continue improving your skin. The laser emits infrared pulses of light energy that reach the deepest layers of your skin, which corrects the problem at its source for long-lasting results.”

