

How I Fixed My Skin

One Girl's Escape from Acne

by Stephanie Murray

Author of Misc. Bliss and general wellness junkie

Follow me, y'all!

<http://www.miscbliss.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/miscbliss>

<http://www.twitter.com/miscbliss>

<http://www.instagram.com/miscbliss>

<http://www.pinterest.com/miscbliss>

Introduction

Hi there!

If you're reading this, that means you've purchased my eBook, and for that I thank you, dear reader! In this eBook, you're going to read *all* about how I took my skin from problematic, acne-ridden, hypersensitive and downright depressing, to clear, vibrant and incredibly low-maintenance and acne-free. Sometimes it seems like my bad skin days were but a dream, but then I look at the pictures and I remember that it really happened.

And yes, you will get to see those pictures. All in good time, dear reader.

First of all, I want to write a big fat disclaimer: **I AM NOT A DOCTOR**. This eBook is written completely from my **personal perspective**, and this means that I am **not eliciting medical advice**.

What worked for me may not work for you, and if anything that I did do does not sit comfortably with you, please do not attempt it or continue with it. This is honestly written from my heart, to try and help other people with the same problem that I had.

I don't want to make any false promises, but I am going to tell you everything I did that took my skin from the worst to the best its ever been.

Now that's out of the way, let me get on with my story. My skin story, that is.

Just before I do, let me fill you in on my situation today. I don't need to worry about my skin as it is so much less temperamental than before. Any small blemishes I do get are minor, and disappear quietly and without scarring. My skin is more supple, softer and generally brighter. And best of all - **I don't have acne anymore**.

Sound good? Keep reading and I will show you how to get to this point, too.

For anyone wondering, here is a picture of me today, with no makeup and terribly bright white light:



Not bad, huh? I'm pretty chuffed with this if I do say so myself! It feels particularly amazing because I certainly never used to have easy skin. In fact, my skin has caused me a lot of pain - physically and emotionally.

When did my problems with my skin start? Well, that's a good question, and I've thought about this a fair bit. Ever since puberty, my skin has been difficult and not exactly the easiest to deal with. In fact, I don't really have any good memories of my skin from about 13 onwards. As a girl, it was clear, beautiful and even, and of course as a child, I didn't

take any notice of this. However, when hormones kicked in, things started to head south, and little did I know this would be the start of a long journey back to my childhood (my skin, not actual time travel).

You know how you do that thing where you suppress bad memories? And then sometimes, someone mentions something, and a blip of a memory or moment in your life bubbles to the surface, and you feel 14 all over again? Sometimes that happens to me when I think about my skin.

I remember being at high school with my hair tied up in a ponytail, and I had hormonal spots down around my neck. *Who has spots on their neck?* I thought. My friends didn't seem to have this problem, so eventually I just figured that it was just my skin, and maybe it would get better as I got older.

Of course, this didn't stop me from trying a number of unsuccessful, unsuitable remedies. First up was salicylic acid. I remember going to my local pharmacy and asking for a spot solution, and this was the one recommended. To be fair, this does work as a spot treatment, but it's not exactly the best idea to apply acid to your skin.

This is the perfect example of short term thinking when it comes to skincare: it may cause your one spot to heal now, but how is it helping your skin over the longterm? Moreover, what harm does that acid do that you can't see?

I also used to apply harsh cleansers and masks to my face in an attempt to dry it out and rid it of sebum. Yes, I had done some reading on the subject and had learned that sebum (oil) was apparently the cause of these pustular bumps (sorry, but that's what they were).

Of course, I didn't think about how to *stop* or limit the sebum, instead just waiting for my skin to flare up and then blasting it with chemicals. To my surprise, my skin did not like this, and would react aggressively, flaring up, becoming red, sore, dry - and **still not clear**.

This is just an introduction to my journey - the story goes on for many years. My hope with this eBook is that I can save you those years, that pain, the heartache. I know that

everyone has problems, and that problematic skin isn't the worst thing in the world. However (and this is a big however), that knowledge doesn't stop you from *feeling* like it is the worst thing in the world. Like your skin is what's stopping you from being happy, from being pretty, from being your best self.

I'm not saying any of this is true, and when I look at someone I focus on their spirit, their kindness and their sincerity. However, I know that feeling when you don't feel good, you don't feel your best and you can feel others' eyes on you. And it's not nice.

I want to save you from having to go through that.

And so, it is with these thoughts in mind that we begin our first step on this journey. Let me introduce you to the first step that really started to fix my skin. A word of warning: this may be controversial for some of you. Don't say I didn't tell you.

Step 1: How Many Hormones is Too Many?

If you're anything like me, you hate science with a passion. I mean, what has science ever done for me, am I right? (No.) In all seriousness, I am the sort of person who finds it difficult to naturally understand scientific problems and equations. I am much more of a feeling-oriented, *woo woo* kinda girl, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

However, when it comes to basic biology, I can be a little bit blind - which is especially problematic when trying to heal the largest organ in your body.

So, let me take you back to 2012. For the previous few years, I had been receiving hormonal contraception via an implant (you can figure out which one) and it had worked well up until that point. I mean, apart from the irregular periods and the increased severity of PMS symptoms, everything was dandy.

As I was but a 24-year-old woman, the idea of getting pregnant terrified the bejesus out of me, and so this implant contraception was the best way to settle my mind (and womb).

However.

(This is another big however.)

I found that around early 2012, something started happening with me. I wasn't feeling right. You know, looking back, I think it was a number of factors that kicked this off: I had finished uni but wasn't working my "dream job"; I had no clue what this "dream job" would be, and; my skin started getting out of control. Like, think of a rabid rottweiler, chomping at the bit, trying to maul you, and then you start to get the idea of how I felt like my skin and I were getting along.

Think I'm being dramatic?

Well then, I guess it's just time for me to drop the first bomb of this eBook onto y'all. Enter my first "before" shot, taken in early 2012. For those with a sensitive stomach, please avert your eyes (I put that in for comedic effect, I know ain't no one turning away from this car crash):



Yep, that was me, and I hated it. Well, to be honest, I kind of stopped thinking about it, because I thought it was just how my skin was. The worst part? A dermatologist I went to see (and paid way too much money for) said the same thing.

Yep, that was her scientific diagnosis, and it made me feel even worse.

This "dermatologist" (and I use that term very loosely) literally told me that "some people just have bad skin" - and she also went on to compliment my boyfriend's skin, who was there with me. It's true, he has amazing skin. However, this isn't exactly the kind of thing you want to hear when you are *paying a professional to help you fix your skin*. In fact, it seemed highly unprofessional to me.

After a very brief consultation, she readily prescribed me a number of chemicals (prescription drugs) and also mentioned that if these didn't work, we could always try a permanent chemical solution (a very popular acne "quick fix" that you may also know). If you choose this "solution", you can't drink for a number of weeks, and it also leaves your skin incredibly dried out - kind of problematic when you **need moisture to have healthy, clear skin.**

What a mess.

As you can imagine, this consultation ended in tears (mine, not the dermatologist's). I honestly felt like things couldn't get any better, and the "medical professional" who was supposed to help me obviously couldn't care less - except about her paycheck.

Luckily, I have a very smart boyfriend who refused to believe it was just "how things were". He held my hand and told me that we would figure it out together. I know I am really lucky to have him in my life, and so I want to pay this faith forward to you. I want to be your supportive boyfriend holding your hand... okay, that sounds a bit weird, but I'm sure you get the gist.

So how does all of this relate to hormones?

Well, my boyfriend started thinking that maybe my hormonal contraception had something to do with my flared up, angry skin. I claimed that I hadn't had this problem before, and although I had always had slightly problematic skin, it was true that it had never been this bad. Even as a teenager.

It was pretty embarrassing being 23 and having the worst skin of my life. I don't know why I was defending it, but I guess I'd just written off in my head that anything could possibly work.

However, my boyfriend is much more logical than I, and gently insisted that we test it out. So, after making an appointment to see a different doctor, we spoke to her about different options.

Unfortunately, this ended badly too, as she was rather rude and dismissive of my boyfriend and spoke only to me. Of course, I understand that she was addressing me as it is my body and she probably has seen a lot of questionable relationships come through her office, but this rubbed both of us up the wrong way.

Eventually, I made another appointment to see my local family doctor - and finally this worked. She was really inclusive of both of us, and was happy to discuss options. She prescribed me the pill and removed the implant. This was the first step in my recovery.

I took the pill for a week and then we thought - what if I just see what happens if I let my body go *au naturel*? No hormonal contraception of any kind. After all, I hadn't really seen what my skin was like naturally, post-puberty, as I had had the implant inserted before my 19th birthday. What if, just maybe, things weren't as bad as they seemed?

[BIG DISCLAIMER: At this point, I want to *really* hit the point home that **I am not a doctor and cannot choose your contraception for you.** This is my personal experience and I don't want to encourage anyone to be unsafe with regards to pregnancy or STD's. I was in a loving, long-term relationship (and still am, thankfully) and we made these decisions as a couple. Of course, this hormonal contraception was replaced with physical contraception and we are both really responsible people. Do what's right for you - unwanted pregnancy is not my goal here!]

Looking back, it seems like things were so easy, but at the time I was a bit of a mess, emotionally and physically. Coming off all contraception meant that my body had to readjust to its natural rhythms, and this took a little bit of time.

However, I started to feel better pretty quickly, and those monstrous mood swings that I had been having (oh, did I forget to mention those?) started to dissipate.

Most of all, we started to notice a change in my skin. Of course, my boyfriend spends much longer looking at my face than I do (just), and he started to notice a certain clarity in my skin. Not specifically with the acne straight away, but moreso with the texture. I

used to get *reeeeally* oily later in the day, and I thought for years that I “just had oily skin”. However, with the chemicals out of my body, my skin returned to its natural state - and this was surprisingly even, smooth and calm.

My first suggestion to you, if you are suffering from acne, is to **take note of the hormones and chemicals you are ingesting**. Even if it’s something you’ve taken for years (but especially if it’s not), reactions can happen and it really is the easiest problem to solve first. It doesn’t require dietary changes or really any major lifestyle changes - but it can cause *huge* changes for your skin.

For me, my healing process started when this implant was removed. I never thought it would work and I resisted it initially, but when I started to see the results, I was amazed.

Things were finally starting to look better... but I still had a long way to go.

Step 2: From A to Zinc

As I mentioned in the last chapter, I am in no way scientifically-inclined. Sometimes I struggle to see reason, and I often just veer away from “science-y things” (a highly technical term) because I don’t always understand them intuitively. And so, this eBook is designed to help you in the simplest way possible - so that you don’t need to struggle for as long as I did.

Once I had the hormonal contraception removed from my body, things started to get better. My skin was clearer, my mood swings were under control and my overall outlook on life lifted. Honestly, for a while there I was pretty depressed, and the fact that my skin felt like a constant volcanic eruption really didn’t help matters. The next step was to address any mineral imbalances in my body - and there was one huge, glaring imbalance.

Seeing as I’m being really open and upfront with you in this book, let’s just carry on the theme: sometimes I get dandruff. Sometimes a little, sometimes more than a little. The thing is, I would also get dry, flaky skin on my face, in my eyebrows, and always around my fingernails.

Again, I thought this was just ‘how my body was’ and didn’t really think twice about it. However, my boyfriend, being the sleuth that he is, had another opinion.

I have never been one to take vitamins or mineral supplements, as I thought they didn’t do much good for anything. Why take a pill, I reasoned, when you could just eat the foods that naturally contain those nutrients?

However, I hadn’t really thought about the fact that I could have an inherent, rather extreme imbalance in my body which would be very difficult to satisfy solely from food, and that *could* actually be corrected by vitamins from a jar. At least to start with. And to this day, I still take this magical mineral.

What am I talking about?

Zinc, of course!

My boyfriend did the research (are you sensing a common theme here?) and found the fascinating information that zinc assists with skin renewal, dry skin, and also semen production (two out of three ain't bad).

I reluctantly agreed to try these pills - well, actually, I started off by trying a *quarter of a tablet* each day. Yep, I was splitting one of those tiny, scientifically-tested, 100% safe, supermarket-bought vitamins because I wasn't completely satisfied that they wouldn't somehow mess with my whole internal system. Rest assured, they didn't - but they did do something else.

After a little while, I realised that a quarter of a tablet wasn't going to cut it, so I bumped up my portion to half a zinc tablet. Crazy, I know! Keep in mind that the recommended dose for adults is one tablet daily (at least with the zinc vitamins I have. PLEASE check your dosage before taking any and check with your doctor if you are unsure!).

Eventually, I worked up the courage to start popping a whole zinc pill each day, curious to see if this would actually work.

And let me tell you, it did.

I'm not 100% sure when it started to happen, but gradually my boyfriend noticed another change in my skin's appearance. The pimples that I had been suffering from were becoming less angry, less profuse and, miraculously, less frequent. It was like my skin had this magic barrier that was preventing the acne from working too deep into my body (that's how it felt anyhow... again, I ain't no scientist).

To be honest, I couldn't believe that it had worked. I had previously had no faith in vitamin treatments, and thought that they could potentially do more harm than good. I hadn't considered the fact that **a certain mineral (zinc) could even out an imbalance in my body.**

If you do a quick search about the effects of zinc on the skin, you will find a number of websites talking about the beneficial properties zinc has. The thing that frustrates me is, why aren't our dermatologists and doctors and other medical professionals talking about this? If that "dermatologist" I had paid to be patronized by had bothered to mention the *possibility* that a store-bought vitamin supplement could *potentially* work, I would have been all over that like a rash (or acne, as they case may have been).

Of course, doctors are commissioned/courted by drug companies to prescribe as many chemicals as possible, and a simple solution such as zinc wouldn't provide as many kickbacks for them.

This is a real shame, because **zinc really does work.**

Again, I want to take the time to address the fact that **I am not a doctor** (just making that clear!), and cannot prescribe your required dosage of any vitamins. However, there are a number of credible vitamin companies that provide tested and safe doses of zinc, and I would suggest that you try these safely. The effect that zinc had on my skin was astounding. In fact, let's throw in another picture of my skin starting to heal, after I'd started taking my zinc supplements daily:



Still not perfect (especially with that mammoth pimple) - but much better.

So, by this point I had removed the contraception that was messing with my hormones, and I had also started taking a mineral supplement to fill a void that I clearly had. Why I had this zinc imbalance, I wasn't sure - but I was about to find out the hard way.

Step 3: Who's Got Milk?

If you know me, you'll know that I have a sweet tooth. A few years ago, I managed to lose a lot of weight successfully and naturally, and I did so by training my tastebuds to think differently (that is, if tastebuds could think). It's surprising how your tastes *do* change after a short time of eating differently and healthily. In fact, it's something I want to return to soon, and I will hopefully be able to tell you about it in another eBook in the near future.

Anyway, the reason I'm telling you about this is because during this period of weight loss, I still didn't give up one thing: milk. Yes, I cut it down, because we know milk is fatty and you shouldn't have too much of it, but I didn't think any more of it. I didn't think, for instance, that milk could have been the root of all of my skin problems.

Yes, dear reader, I hadn't yet considered the effect that my daily indulgence was having on my skin - but I was about to find out.

Throughout my teen years, some of my fondest memories are when my mum would pick me up after school and have a chocolate milk drink in the car for me. Most days I would have to catch the bus home, so it was a real treat when she was able to come and drive me home. Of course, the snacks didn't hurt either, and it became a habit for me to drink milk every day. At home, I would have milk either by itself or with a calorific chocolate powder - not the most nutritional drink around, but with all of the advertisements telling us to drink milk, I figured at least I was getting my daily calcium intake.

Right?

This went on for years. When I started working at a bookshop in university, my boss would kindly pay for us all to have a coffee (or two) each morning. While I was previously unfamiliar with caffeinated beverages, I quickly became accustomed to downing a cafe mocha each shift. If you've ever tried one of these, you'll know how addictive the alluring mix of coffee and chocolate can be. If you haven't tried one - don't! It's a slippery slope and ain't no cafe mochas gonna help you win a triathlon, that's for darn sure.

So where am I getting to with all of this? Well, I was firmly in the habit of drinking milk, and this would continue right up until even last year. Yes, when I moved to Korea, I was surprised by the café culture of the country, and found myself idly sipping on café mochas either in store or on the walk back to work. Whenever I could get 'em, I would. However, something was always lurking in the back of my mind.

A few years ago, around the time I had my hormonal contraception removed, I had been sitting in a library one day, flicking through a fascinating book. The title eludes me now, and if I am ever back in my home town I will endeavour to find it, because it planted a seed in my mind which has had amazing results for my skin. This seed was that maybe, just maybe, **milk is the cause of acne**.

Let that sink in for a second.

I have a paragraph from the book saved on my phone, in which a study is quoted where a scientist studied teenage patients for ten years (until they were no longer teenagers, I presume). The findings were that milk contributed to most of their acne. Additionally, when they stopped drinking milk, their acne slowly disappeared. Coincidence? I think not.

Now, I bet you're thinking: Steph, if you had read this and knew this already, why didn't you cut out milk straight away? Well, dear reader, that is a good question and the only way I can answer it is: humans make mistakes. I remember flicking through this book, and the author had been to Japan in the early nineties to work with models, and then she had returned in the 'naughties'. The big difference she noticed? Their skin. The introduction of milk and the café culture in Japan, similar to that in Korea, had seemingly wreaked havoc on the Japanese models' previously clear skin. One brief look at the hormones in milk seems to tell us why.

Think about who drinks milk. Babies, right? How about in other species? It's always the babies - and they only drink their mothers' milk. Which species do you know, apart from

humans, that consume the milk of another species? It just doesn't happen - and we should probably be paying close attention to that.

The reason I am making such a big fuss over this whole milk thing is because it contains hormones that change the function and properties of your skin. In simple terms (because that's how I understand it), milk contains a hormone called Insulin-like Growth Factor 1 (IGF-1), which stimulates your oil glands and causes your skin to produce more sebum.

It has 'been suggested' (aka the dairy industry is trying to throw shade) that IGF-1 is not destroyed during the pasteurization process, and that it also has trouble being metabolized by the gut. This is why you may sometimes get an upset stomach from drinking milk (I certainly did!) and why milk can be so dangerous for your skin.

Long story short: **milk contains hormones which directly cause acne.**

Want some evidence? Here, have another look at my acne-riddled skin, during my milk-sippin' days (again, this isn't the worst of it... but it's still pretty bad at this point):



I now realize that I am pretty much 100% lactose intolerant, and I was trying to ignore it this whole time - to the severe detriment of my skin.

If you're paying attention (which I'm sure you are!), you will notice that these three tips I have talked about all address internal, biological causes of acne. These are what I feel are the most important and will give the biggest results in the shortest period of time.

Of course, I have more tips coming up that are important, but these three should be addressed first. I know what it's like to feel like you're wading through an ocean of acne advice, none of which seem to work and some of which seem to contradict each other. It sucks.

However, take it from me that you want to **address the internal causes first**, and then the external causes after that.

Also, notice how in the pictures the majority of my acne is concentrated along my jaw and neckline? This area is **highly reactive to your hormones**, and so any disruptions of normal skin functioning (ie. pimples) is most likely a result of a hormonal issue or imbalance.

Keep that in mind if you've been scrubbing and applying topical treatments and just getting no results. **Fix the hormonal problem first**, and then you have much less work to do in the way of applying potions and lotions to your skin.

Of course, once you've got all your hormones in check, there are some external things you can do to improve the texture and appearance of your skin. Let's start with the holy grail of clear skin: **Korean skincare**.

Step 4: Your Korean Skincare Routine

When I moved to Korea in March of 2013, my skin was starting to heal, but was by no means perfect. As I mentioned before, I was still addicted to milky drinks and my body was still returning to its natural, contraception-free state. When I arrived in Korea, I couldn't believe the abundance and range of skincare and makeup shops, and I made it my mission to buy as many cutesy products as possible (and boy, I succeeded!).

Little did I know my obsession with the cute packaging would turn into a revelation for my skin.

Firstly, let's be clear: when I initially started shopping for Korean beauty products, I often didn't really understand what they did or when I was supposed to use them. Take toner, for example. As far as I knew, toner was an astringent that you used following cleansing, in order to remove any residue that the cleanser may have missed.

However, in Korea (and most Asian skincare products), toner is a *completely* different thing. Yes, it is used post-cleansing, but instead of ridding your skin of moisture, it is actually a light layer of moisture designed to prep your skin for the coming steps. And there are a lot of steps to come.

So, being a skincare n00b, I took to the blogs to help me wade through this new, fascinating world. I learned that Korean women do a **double-cleanse**: one first to remove makeup, and the second to actually clean the face. This alone was pretty groundbreaking - you mean I can't just do it all in one step and be done with it?

Often the makeup remover was a cleansing oil, which seemed terrifying to me, as I had labelled myself as someone with oily skin (although this was no longer the case). I really wanted to try to use a Korean skincare routine, but **I just didn't know where to start.**

And so I bought everything.

Researching online, I quickly learned that the steps were as follows (and modifiable to your skincare needs): **first cleanse** (to remove makeup); **second cleanse** (to cleanse the skin); **toner**; **essence/serum**; **emulsion**; **cream**.

Of course, you have optional steps to include, depending on the time of day: sunscreen for daytime; sleeping packs and face masks for nighttime; an exfoliant a few times a week. The possibilities are endless... but I was determined to at least make it through one full Korean skincare routine.

Just to be clear: an essence is a light, liquid-y moisturiser. A serum is similar, although usually designed to target a particular concern (anti-ageing, redness etc). These two products have a higher concentration of active ingredients in them, and are often quite light in texture. An emulsion is a light moisturiser, similar to a lotion.

As you can probably see, you apply the products in increasing degrees of thickness. Lightest to heaviest, finishing with your cream or sleeping pack (which is essentially an overnight mask).

I purchased one of each product, and then one night decided to give it a go. I painstakingly removed my makeup and then cleansed my face again. I applied toner (initially with a cotton pad, but later on would just use my fingers to dab it on, so as to minimize irritation), followed by an essence and then an emulsion. Finally, I applied a moisturising cream and then, the cherry on top: a sleeping pack. I went to bed feeling like a version of the princess and the pea, except this time there was no pea, just the million layers of skincare products.

The next day, my boyfriend immediately noticed the difference in my skin's texture. This time, so did I. My skin looked smoother, plumper and more nourished. It was weird: I'd never really noticed that it was lacking moisture, and I thought that applying too much moisture could only be a bad thing. However, the Korean skincare routine taught me that moisture is king - but it's all in the application. Previously, I was doing a 1-2-3 routine of cleanse, tone and moisturize, dumping on a thick layer of night cream after my astringent

toner, in the hopes that it would absorb and do the trick quickly. But this is not how you go about getting that Korean doll skin, reader!

The funny thing about following a Korean skincare routine is that while it may seem counterintuitive, **adding a lot of light layers of moisture actually won't leave your skin oily or greasy at all.** Instead, the thinness of each layer allows it to soak in, providing a deeper, more even nourishment. In turn, your skin will calm down and be way less high maintenance. And that can only be a good thing.

When you've had acne before, you start to see skincare products in terms of their "effectiveness", which often really refers to their harshness. If you're using harsh, abrasive cleansers or scrubs, please **stop!** Your skin is only going to react more to this and get angry in retaliation. Similarly, if you are suffering from oily skin and are using products to dry out your skin, **stop!** Depriving your skin of moisture only results in it overproducing oil, making your skin greasier than ever before. Take it from someone who knows.

So, where do you start with your Korean skincare routine?

Once you've taken care of the internal factors, this is the easy (and fun!) part. I would recommend anything with bee venom in it, as this is intended to help sensitive skin and calm redness. Also, I have found snail secretion products (yes, snail slime) to be a very effective and gentle moisturiser. Of course, your routine depends on your own skin type and concerns, but it's worth testing and investigating. Once you get the balance right, you won't ever want to go back.

Step 5: Getting the Zzz's

As a night owl, sleep is not something that I give enough weight to. This may sound like a crazy thing to say, and maybe it is, but as someone who has had sleeping problems before, the thought of sleep sometimes... stresses me out. Of course, being stressed makes it very difficult to fall asleep, and so the cycle continues.

Back when I was having my daily mood swings and emotional rollercoaster rides, thanks to my hormonal contraception, I was finding it very difficult to get to sleep on time, for a long time, and consistently at that. Sleep was just another thing that I thought I wasn't good at. I know we are all humans and everyone needs to sleep, but sometimes it just doesn't seem that simple.

During that time, in early 2012, a number of things were happening that were compounding my depressive state. One of these was my enormous lack of sleep. I was so anxious and emotional that it was keeping me up, and in turn my sleep deprivation was causing my anxiety and stress. The cycle continued. I would worry about everything, and just couldn't seem to shake myself out of it. To be fair, I don't think there was one sole cause of this: the combination of hormonal contraception, being 25 with no career plan, severely deprived of sleep and suffering from a hormonal problem I didn't yet know how to solve all compounded to create an unhappy me.

That was not a fun time - but at least now I know it was not in vain.

So, back to sleep (in this book, not actually!). I remember being a kid and sometimes having trouble getting to the Land of Nod, simply because my brain would become more alive at night. This is a trend that has definitely continued throughout my teenage and adult life, and I do think that certain people function better at certain hours. For me, I seem to come alive in the late afternoon and evening, right through to the night. Of course, for the past few years I have worked a full time day job, and I do enjoy getting things done in the morning. However, it's much more difficult for me to consistently rouse myself out of bed at 8am than it would be for an early riser. I believe (and I may be wrong, but this is my personal opinion) that different people have different internal

clocks, and although we can work around them, there are certain preferences which create an optimal state for each individual.

For me, that means sleeping in and staying up late.

However... this isn't always the best thing for a good night's sleep.

See my conundrum here?

One thing I have learned, though, is that sleep is vital to my skin's health. Yep, you hear it all the time, but do you really know why? Basically, sleep is the time when our skin is able to repair itself. If you look at an organism as efficient as the human body, where not a single process is wasted, the fact that we still need 8 hours of sleep (give or take) should show that it is an invaluable process that we shouldn't take for granted. And yet... I have spent a lot of time doing just that.

When I wasn't sleeping much (I'm talking maybe 5 hours a night), I was crabby, moody, erratic... and that's just the start of it. My skin wasn't able to heal itself properly, which I am certain exacerbated my condition and drew it out much longer than it needed to be. Since I have fixed my hormonal issues, however, I have been finding it much easier to get to sleep and have a higher quality of sleep, too. This has in turn led to my skin being plump, soft and repaired. Plus, I feel amazing in the morning too.

I know sleep can be a big issue for some people, so here are some tips that have helped me:

- **Wind down before bed.** This means no exercise in the evening, no TV and computers about an hour before bedtime. I like to have a bath, read a book and make sure the lights are niiiice and dim.
- **Exercise!** This is something I have recently been committing too, and it's amazing how fast a good workout will knock you out at night (in a good way). Get those endorphins pumping and see how much easier you sleep.
- **Calm your mind.** I'm still working on this one, but when I get it right, boy does it help. I believe it's called "meditation", although I don't think I really do millions of years of

this practice justice. Instead, I try to become aware of the thoughts racing around my mind and just watch them go by. Don't get sucked into any thoughts, just acknowledge them and try to keep your mind still. If you're not focused on something, especially something stressful, it's much easier to let go and fall asleep.

These are three tips that have really helped me get my snooze on. Honestly, if someone like me, who had seriously disordered sleep patterns, can master the art of sleep, you can too. Your skin will thank you for it. All of the above steps to clearer skin are amplified tenfold if you can get enough sleep each night. It will make the healing process much faster and more efficient - and you'll feel amazing, too.

Bonus Tips: Easy Ways to Maintain Your Clear Skin

These five steps are the main things that helped me to achieve the clear skin that I have today. It wasn't always easy, and it certainly wasn't immediate - but it was much faster than anything else that I ever tried.

There are a few more words of wisdom that I would like to share with you, which may or may not make your journey to clear skin that much easier. These range from the simple to the perhaps bizarre, but (in my opinion) all of these are worth consideration.

- **Watch your diet.**

As I discussed earlier, I found that milk was a huuuuuge culprit for my huuuuuge pimples. Additionally, you may find that other foods interfere with and irritate your skin. Look out for these. For me, I try to limit my intake of bread and high-GI carbs (they just don't sit well with me), most dairy products (yoghurt is a notable exception, as it is fermented and thus the lactose is in a different form), and sugar. Of course, this is not the easiest thing to do. However, I try to focus instead on what I *can* eat: lots of fruit and veggies, low-GI carbs (I love oats in the morning) and of course, water. The most important thing is that you find what works for you, so test, test, test and keep notes.

- **Wash yo' face!**

This is an obvious one, but is incredibly important in clearing up your skin. You know when you get home late one night and you just *can't* find the energy to wash your face? Well, you gotta do it! Sleeping with makeup on is one of the worst things you can do for your skin, as it completely blocks your pores and prevents the repairing that is oh-so-important during sleep. Similarly, if you find yourself hot and sweaty after a workout, be sure to wash your face as soon as you can. Especially in the initial stages of clearing your skin, you don't want to provide acne any excuse to latch on and cause pimples. Keep your face clean and moisturized and everything will be easier.

- **Hands Off!**

Again, this is one of those seemingly simple but surprisingly effective steps that will help to keep your skin beautifully clear and spot-free. You know how we are told that

our fingers are covered in billions of germs that we just can't see? Well, why are you letting that on your face? I am incredibly guilty of this, but touching your face is just **not a good idea**. Again, adding excess grime to a sticky situation is not going to help matters, and it just provides you with more work to do. If you find yourself touching your face often, try and visualize your hands covered with slime (or something more disgusting, if you wish). Don't let that mess near your beautiful face!

The Final Part: My Skin Today

Now that you have read all of my tips to clear skin, you may just be wondering: what does my skin look like today? And for that question I am prepared, dear reader. Here is a picture of me without makeup, no filter, and pretty unflattering light:

Here is another one, of me in the morning, fuzzy hair and all:

It's quite the difference, no? To be honest, I sometimes forget just how far my skin has come, and I need to remind myself by looking at those pictures from years ago. My skin really was angry, aggravated and hypersensitive, and it was reacting violently to my mistreatment. If there is one thing I've learned from this whole journey, it's this: **listen to your skin.**

Our bodies are smarter than we even know, and sometimes they try to tell us things. If you have spots erupting on your face, particularly near your chin and jawline, understand that there is something going on inside of you which needs to be balanced. Our bodies are incredibly intelligent organisms, and I truly believe that they want to run perfectly and effortlessly. Of course, over a life time, things can go wrong, and it is our job to isolate the cause and set them right.

These days, my skin is much more forgiving, too. For instance, I am often a forgetful dingus and don't remember to take my zinc everyday - and that's okay. Because I have taken care of the big things (no hormones, either from contraception or from milk), I need zinc far less than I did when I was consuming a lot of dairy (mainly milk). It's funny, things have a way of balancing out, you just need to give them a push in the right direction.

Of course, I still do get break outs occasionally - but these are much less frequent and *far* less severe. No longer do I get big, angry pus-filled bumps sprouting up everywhere faster than you can say "concealer". Instead, I get a gentle reminder that it's "that time of the month" in the form of small, isolated bumps that disappear in a few days. I'm not saying my skin is perfect, but it's a whole lot better than it ever was.

My greatest hope from writing this book is that it helps you, my lovely reader. I really went through an emotional rollercoaster trying to fix this thing, and I want to spare you that pain. Of course, I know many of you will have already tried numerous strategies to fix your skin, perhaps similar methods to what I tried. That's okay. Just know that you can come out the other side of it and have problem-free, easy-breezy skin. Honestly, if I can do it, you can.

My parting message is this: **don't give up**. If this sounds dramatic, just know that I honestly, sincerely mean it. I know how hard it is to suffer through problem skin, particularly into your early adulthood where it seems like you just *shouldn't* have this issue any longer. Your friends or peers may not be able to relate, and it can leave you feeling pretty alone and insecure. I know, I've been there. Please just know that there is **always an answer**, you might just need to look a little harder. But it's there.

I sincerely hope this eBook was helpful to you, and I would love nothing more than for my advice to result in your skin clearing up and becoming the best it can be. It's what you deserve. I want you to say goodbye to problem skin - because your new life starts now.

