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## How to Properly Remove Blackheads at Home

Brittany Burhop Fallon | May 31, 2022



I'm not sure there are many things more satisfying than a blackhead removal strip, or—cover your ear dermatologists!—watching one practically jump out of a clogged pore after a good squeeze. (If you can relate, you're my people.) Though DIY removal can appease your inner "picker," it's not recommended by the pros unless you follow the proper steps. "Blackheads are so satisfying to remove, and I am guilty of trying to do it the wrong way—pinching my skin to the point of a bruise and causing more damage and irritation," says Boston facial plastic surgeon Jaimie DeRosa, MD. "Luckily there are ways to properly remove blackheads at home." Here's how the experts say you should remove pesky blackheads without damaging your skin.

### **Wash up.**

"When you want to remove blackheads yourself, we tell our clients to follow certain steps to avoid damaging their skin and creating inflammation, hyperpigmentation or scars," says licensed medical aesthetician **Terrie Absher**, founder of Total Glow. "First, your hands have to be clean. Even if you think they are clean, wash them again. Second, wash your face carefully."

Dr. DeRosa suggests using a cleanser, scrub and possibly a mask that contains alphahydroxy acids (AHAs) that can help to exfoliate the dead skin and reduce blackheads. "Look for products that contain glycolic, lactic or mandelic acid. You might also try salicylic acid-containing cleansers, scrubs and masks, as this BHA—betahydroxy acid—is oil-soluble, so can get right down into the pores and help break down the blackheads."

As for masks, Dr. DeRosa loves those that contain both AHAs and BHAs, such as Kate Somerville ExfoliKate Intensive Exfoliating Treatment, “which includes lactic acid, salicylic acid and fruit enzymes. If you want a great clay mask, then my go-to is Revision Skincare Pore Purifying Clay Mask. The clay acts to unclog pores, absorb excess oil and shrink pores.”

#### **Take temperature into consideration.**

“Ideally, you would want to extract after a shower, which is the best time because the heat and moisture soften the blackheads so they can be easily extracted,” says Absher. “While our pores don’t open and close when our skin is a normal temperature or cold, the blackheads can be pretty stubborn, and debris is just a solid plug that we don’t want to force out through our pores by squeezing. When we don’t use this process and we try to extract blackheads when our face is cold or without steaming, the congestion or debris is often a drier, more densely-packed plug, which is very difficult to remove from the pores. This is especially true for people with small pores.

#### **Use gentle pressure.**

“Using two index fingers wrapped with cotton gauze or facial tissue, grasp, and gently wiggle your fingers to ease the blackhead out of the pore,” says Tam Lamarre, an aesthetic nurse practitioner at SkinSpirit NYC.

#### **Or a tool that does the work for you.**

Blackheads that sit deeper in the skin may need the help of a tool to encourage them to come out. “A good at-home blackhead-removing device is the Dermaflash Dermapore Ultrasonic Extractor,” says Absher. “While ultrasonic extractors have created some damage with users at home, if you follow the proper steps and remember to be gentle, it will easily remove the blackhead and debris. If blackheads don’t come out easily, do not use more pressure at the risk of damaging your skin.”

Dr. DeRosa recommends a stainless-steel extractor, such as Utopia Care Professional Comedone Remover. “Also remember to always clean the tool with rubbing alcohol before and after extractions.”

#### **Follow with the right skin-care products.**

“After removing the blackheads, wash your face again and then follow up with a good salicylic acid toner before applying other products,” says Absher. A witch hazel mist like Thayer’s Witch Hazel Toner or Humphreys Organic Pure Witch Hazel Toner can also be helpful.

### **The Scoop on Pore Strips**

According to Lamarre, there is no harm in using pore strips occasionally, but they do not provide a deep cleaning. “The results are temporary, as they only target the oxidized top layer of a blackhead. Also, be aware of possible skin irritation or allergic reaction to the adhesive on the strip.”

### **In-Office Extractions**

Lamarre recommends against removing your own blackheads and advises leaving it to the pros. “Improper removal of blackheads can lead to skin injury, broken capillaries, hyperpigmentation and scarring,” she says. “However, if you must try it yourself and you find yourself squeezing or digging into your skin, that is your cue to stop and book an appointment with a professional. Skin therapists have tools, products and added advantage of a better view, using a magnifying lamp. Professional extractions are generally part of a deep-cleansing facial treatment, which includes cleansing, exfoliation—with or without stream—extractions, an antiseptic mist or toner, serum, moisturizer and SPF.” However, blackheads can also be found on the back and other parts of the body.

Professional extractions typically range between \$100 and \$250, depending on the salon, clinic or doctor’s office you visit, the method used and the number of extractions that need to be done. “Our professional extractions don’t hurt, but they’re maybe a little bit uncomfortable at times,” Absher notes. There may be some redness and mild swelling at the extraction sites, which should resolve shortly after the facial. “With this type of treatment, we may also add our medical LED light therapy as well, depending upon how deep we had to go,” she adds. “You should expect to walk out with your skin feeling incredibly clean, looking more even and fresh and glowing.”

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