When managing patients with acne, treatment success depends as much on the therapeutic regimen as it does on appropriate patient counseling and education. Posters presented at last month’s AAD Annual Meeting offer fresh insights on issues in acne management.

Acne and Patient Habits
Despite the best efforts of dermatologists, pharmaceutical companies, and others, acne myths persist. When Alexa Kimball, MD and colleagues from Stanford University surveyed 103 freshmen students at that institution, they learned that many common misconceptions are still widely accepted (P113).

Ninety percent of respondents believed poor hygiene worsened acne. Both males and females believed stress caused acne (88.3 percent) and that drinking more water would improve acne (68.9 percent), though more women believed these assertions. Close to 60 percent of respondents believed increased face washing improves acne.

Dermatologists have long recognized that acne is not a sign of poor hygiene. In fact, most dermatologists caution against over-washing, suspecting that it actually exacerbates the disease. Another study by Kimball, et al. (P107) suggests that face-washing has only minimal impact on acne.

The study followed 34 male subjects with mild to moderate acne who were permitted to continue any ongoing acne therapy except for medicated washes. After an initial two-week period of twice-daily washing, subjects were randomized to wash their face once, twice, or four times daily. All patients used the same mild cleanser.

A blinded evaluator graded patients’ acne every two weeks. Patients who washed their faces twice daily experienced significant improvement in non-inflammatory lesions and open comedones while those who washed once daily demonstrated increases in erythema, inflammatory lesions, and papules over the second half of the study. Patients who washed their faces four times per day demonstrated no statistically significant changes in acne. Importantly, no statistically significant differences emerged between the study groups at any point. There was a slight association between erythema and the amount of cleanser used per washing.

Considering popular perceptions, many patients want to know if their exercise habits influence acne. Patients and dermatologists have implicated chin straps and shoulder pads in exacerbating acne. The combination of moisture, friction, and occlusion theoretically combine to influence acne.

A study suggests that exercise-induced sweat occlusion does not significantly affect trunkal acne (P18). Among 30 male patients randomized into three groups (non-exercisers, exercisers who showered within one hour, and those who exercised, sweated, and showered after four or more hours), the change in acne from baseline to study end was similar regardless of exercise or hygiene habits. Exercisers all wore 100 percent cotton tee-shirts. Among exercisers, 83 percent of exercise days were spent in non-contact activities. It seems that standard exercise will not exacerbate acne in most patients.

Better Advice
The studies reiterate the need to be mindful of popular acne myths and their influence on patient behaviors. Patients who believe misconceptions may engage in behaviors that exacerbate acne or may unnecessarily avoid behaviors that could otherwise confer health benefits or improve overall quality of life.

New Data Offer Insights on Acne Patient Care Issues
From uncovering the prevalence of myths to discovering the role of appropriate hygiene, new studies offer guidance to clinicians.

By Paul Winnington, Editor-in-Chief

New in Your Practice
Save the Date. Rosacea Awareness Month (next month) is a good time to remind patients of services offered by the National Rosacea Society (Rosacea Review newsletter, Rosacea Diary, etc.). They can contact the NRS at 1-888-NO-BLUSH or e-mail the society at rosaceas@aol.com.

Go to the Head of the Class. For a convenient way to earn CME credits, visit DermUniversity.com, a new website dedicated to keeping dermatologists up-to-date on the latest treatment trends. Currently, “Rosacea: Current Perspectives on Medical Management,” “Acne Vulgaris: Focus on Optimal Management,” and “Topical Antimicrobials in the Treatment of Acne Vulgaris” are available to physicians and physician assistants. Each course is free for healthcare professionals and offers one credit.