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ROSACEA REVIEW

The National Rosacea Society Newsletter

Lynn Drake, M.D., *Editor*

Rosacea Awareness Month Highlights the Benefits of Medical Therapy

Rosacea can be a vicious cycle – the more you worry about its dreaded appearance, the likelier it may come crashing in at the worst possible time, showing up in the most conspicuous and embarrassing place – the face – as a redness that won't go away, often with unsightly bumps and pimples. Fortunately today, rosacea sufferers have more reason than ever to be optimistic. The good news is that important advances in medical and procedural therapy have made it increasingly possible to achieve the next best thing: clear skin.

The National Rosacea Society (NRS) designated April as Rosacea Awareness Month to educate the public on this often life-disruptive disorder estimated to affect more than 16 million Americans and 415 million individuals worldwide, urging those with warning signs to see a dermatologist for diagnosis and appropriate therapy.

“Recent studies on the burden of

illness of rosacea have shown just how important it is to have clear skin, as the condition can profoundly damage quality of life because of its effect on personal appearance,” said Dr. Linda Stein Gold, director of dermatology clinical research at the Henry Ford Health System. “In so many cases, all it



A new study finds that coffee may help lower the risk of developing rosacea. Learn more on the back page.

takes is a single blemish or a single comment about having a red face to ruin someone's day.”

In an NRS survey of 1,675 rosacea patients, 90 percent said the disorder had lowered their self-esteem and self-confidence, and 52 percent said they had avoided face-to-face contact because of the disorder. In another survey, 51 percent of those with severe symptoms said they had even missed work because of their condition.

When the signs and symptoms of rosacea are virtually eliminated, however, the improvement in patients' lives is often dramatic. In a new NRS survey of more than 750 rosacea patients, 84 percent of those who had achieved clear or almost clear skin said their psychological well-being had improved. Seventy-three percent said it had also improved their social lives, and 61 percent reported improvement in their occupational well-being.

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Rosacea and Depression Linked in New Study

A recent study conducted by researchers at Wake Forest School of Medicine found a correlation between rosacea severity and level of depression.¹

The study asked 195 rosacea patients at a university dermatology clinic to complete a questionnaire on depression. The results showed a direct statistical relationship between the severity of rosacea signs and symptoms and the degree of depression. Around 31 percent of rosacea patients reported some level of depression. Twenty-two percent had minimal depression symptoms, 7

percent had minor depression, 1 percent had moderate major depression and 1 percent had severe major depression.

Patients assessed the severity of their own rosacea symptoms on a 0-10 scale, with responses ranging from 2 (least severe) to 8 (most severe). The researchers found that patients with more serious levels of depression were more likely to have more severe rosacea symptoms: the average rosacea severity for patients with severe major depression was 5.5, whereas the average rosacea severity for patients without depression

was 3.1.

Although only about a third of rosacea patients in the study suffered from some form of depression, the investigators noted that depression is associated with poor adherence to medical treatment. Rosacea can have a serious impact on mental health, but it's also important to remember that this is a treatable condition. Through medical diagnosis and treatment, patients have the opportunity to improve not only their complexion but also their mental health and quality of life.

Doctors Must Consider Skin Sensitivity, Emotional Impact of Symptoms

During a scientific session at the American Academy of Dermatology annual meeting in Washington, DC in March, Dr. Yolanda Helfrich, associate professor of dermatology at the University of Michigan, provided an overview of current treatment options for rosacea, and offered recommendations to physicians to keep in mind when evaluating a rosacea patient for the first time.

“A key part of your initial evaluation should be finding out how sensitive this person’s skin is,” Dr. Helfrich said. “I think skin sensitivity is a very common complaint in patients who have rosacea. You really want to assess their tolerability of moisturizers or topical medications. Can they tolerate the products? Often a rosacea patient comes in and might say, ‘I don’t use anything on my skin at all. Everything burns, everything stings.’ And that’s a patient you may want to approach a little bit differently than one who is able to tolerate any products that they apply.”

Since each rosacea patient’s individual case is unique, Dr. Helfrich also emphasized the importance of determining what personal impact the condition has on a patient.

“I think we can all recognize that sometimes someone might be very bothered by what might be considered to be relatively minimal erythema alone, whereas someone else who has multiple papules and pustules may not be very bothered by it,” she said. “We really need to meet the patient where he or she is.”

She added that it’s important that patients recognize that rosacea is a chronic, long-term, often lifelong disease that can be characterized by periods of flaring and remission, because otherwise they may not continue treatment. “If they don’t know that they may achieve control but their rosacea could flare again, or if they don’t realize they’re going to have to use these topical or oral medications long term, they may not be compliant.”

Awareness

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In contrast, among those whose rosacea had only slightly or moderately improved, just 26 percent reported improvement in psychological well-being, 23 percent in social well-being and 22 percent in occupational well-being.

“Clear skin is not only desirable, but it is increasingly attainable with the advanced medical therapies that are available today. Though they may feel discouraged, the most important thing for those battling the signs and symptoms of rosacea is to visit a dermatologist to be correctly diagnosed and treated,” said Dr. Stein Gold. “Rosacea is a disorder of varying signs and symptoms, and finding the best therapy or combination of therapies for each individual’s case is key.”

Although it can develop in many ways, rosacea typically first appears after age 30 as redness on the cheeks,

nose, chin or forehead that grows ruddier and more persistent over time, and small blood vessels may become visible. Without treatment, bumps and pimples often develop, and burning and stinging are common. In severe cases, the nose may become enlarged from excess tissue, and in many rosacea patients the eyes are also affected, feeling irritated and appearing watery or bloodshot.

During Rosacea Awareness Month and throughout the year, the NRS conducts public education activities to reach the many millions of rosacea sufferers who may not realize they have a medical condition that can be treated, emphasizing the warning signs and urging those who suspect they may have rosacea to see a dermatologist. Comprehensive information and materials are available on the NRS website at rosacea.org. The NRS may also be followed on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest for up-to-date information and tips on rosacea.

Tips for Rosacea-Friendly Skincare

In addition to medical therapy, rosacea sufferers often use many different products on their skin, from sunscreen to moisturizers to makeup. But because rosacea skin can be so sensitive, it’s important to know what’s in those products and avoid ingredients and products that could cause a flare-up.

A recent study found that rosacea patients may be hypersensitive to common ingredients in skin care and cosmetic products.² Some skin care products may even contain ingredients that actively cause rosacea symptoms. For instance, skin lightening creams often contain corticosteroids, whose long-term use has been known to produce rosacea-like symptoms in otherwise healthy skin.

Here are some tips to help ensure a gentle and rosacea-friendly skin care routine:

- Pare down the number of products you use, and focus on creating a regular daily routine with products you know are tolerated by your skin.
- Choose fragrance-free products whenever possible. In an NRS survey, 30 percent of patients reported fragrances as a rosacea trigger.
- Test new products first. Before using a product on your face, try a small amount on skin in a peripheral area, such as your neck. If you have a reaction, avoid the product and note the ingredients.
- Avoid single-use and quick-fix products, as they may contain irritating ingredients such as alcohol, and can be potentially disruptive to your care regimen.
- Keep a diary tracking the products you use and the active ingredients they contain, and note any rosacea symptoms you experience after using them.

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Underdiagnosis of Rosacea Common in Skin of Color

A recent article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* reviewed epidemiological studies of rosacea in people of color and offered tips on how to better recognize its signs and symptoms in darker skin.³

The authors wrote that the misconception that rosacea only affects fair-skinned people, combined with the difficulty detecting redness and other signs and symptoms on darker skin, may explain why the disorder may be underreported and underdiagnosed. In the US, one study found that only 2 percent of diagnosed rosacea patients were black, 2.3 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 3.9 percent were Hispanic or Latino, while global epidemiological studies in skin of color have estimated higher rates — some as high as 10 percent.

The authors pointed out that darker skin tones can make persistent redness more difficult to detect — and darkening from post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, which is more common in skin of color, may also help mask it. The investigators hypothesized that the difficulty visualizing persistent redness in darker skin may be why rosacea is often undiagnosed until the later stages of disease progression, after facial disfigurement has occurred.

Because it may be more difficult to detect rosacea in its early stages, darker skinned patients should pay greater attention to burning or stinging sensations, changes in their skin's appearance, and a history of skin problems. In the absence of visible redness, these may be the main signs of rosacea's early presence.

Reader Survey on Rosacea

If you have rosacea, you are invited to fill out this survey and mail it by August, 2019. The results will appear in a subsequent issue of **Rosacea Review**.

Survey on the Impact of Rosacea on Social Situations

1. Do the visible symptoms of rosacea you experience attract attention in social situations?
 Yes Somewhat No
2. Where has your rosacea attracted attention?
 Work Vacation Shopping
 Social Events Public Events Other _____
3. Has your appearance ever made you act differently in social situations?
 Yes Somewhat No
4. Have you ever avoided social situations because of your rosacea?
 Yes Somewhat No
5. In your experience, what is the best way to deal with unwanted attention due to the appearance of your skin?
 Informing others about rosacea Redirecting conversation
 Ignoring it Other _____
6. Are you:
 Male Female
7. Are you:
 Under 30 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 Over 69

Comments _____

Mail to **Rosacea Review**, 196 James Street, Barrington, IL 60010.

Membership Request/Donation Form

If you would like to become a member of the National Rosacea Society (NRS) and be sent future issues of **Rosacea Review**, complete and mail the form below. Not only will your tax-deductible contribution make important medical research possible, but as a member you will be sent **Rosacea Review** and have access to free educational materials, discounts, free product samples and opportunities to participate in research. Although you may become a member by donating any amount, the suggested minimum is \$25.

- Yes, I want to become a member of the NRS and be sent **Rosacea Review**. Enclosed is a tax-deductible donation for:
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Name _____ Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip code _____ E-mail _____

Detach this form and mail to **Rosacea Review**, 196 James Street, Barrington, IL 60010.

Coffee May Reduce the Risk of Rosacea

A recent study may have those at risk for rosacea racing to refill their coffee mugs: A team of Brown University researchers led by Dr. Wen-Qing Li found that the more caffeinated coffee women drank, the lower their risk was for developing rosacea.⁴

The study analyzed data from 82,737 participants in the Nurses Health Study II, which has conducted a biennial survey to track the medical history and lifestyle practices of 116,000 American nurses since 1989. Among the participants, 4,945 were diagnosed with rosacea during the study period. When the researchers adjusted for other risk factors, such as smoking, alcohol and body mass index, an association between caffeinated coffee consumption and reduced risk of rosacea emerged.

As little as 100 mg of caffeine a day — or about the amount in an average 8-ounce cup of coffee — resulted in a 4 percent lower risk of rosacea, compared with those who drank less than a cup a month. Moreover, those who drank four or more cups of coffee a day had a 23 percent lower risk of developing the disorder.

Surprisingly, patients who drank decaffeinated coffee were not found to have a significantly altered risk for rosacea diagnosis. And while overall caffeine intake was found to be associated with decreased risk of rosacea, there was no significant correlation found between the consumption of other caffeinated substances like tea, soda or chocolate and rosacea risk.

The investigators speculated that coffee may cause the blood vessels in the face to constrict, lessening the visible signs of rosacea. They also noted that caffeine has been documented to have immunosuppressant and antioxidative properties, which may help decrease the inflammation of rosacea, and is known to modulate levels of hormones that may contribute to flare-ups.

Hot beverages such as coffee are a commonly reported trigger for rosacea flare-ups, and one study found that the temperature was to blame. Rosacea sufferers may want to let their coffee cool before drinking it, or opt for iced coffee instead.

“This is a very interesting finding, and for rosacea patients who enjoy their (not too hot) caffeinated coffee, this is reassuring,” said Dr. Rajani Katta, a dermatologist and the author of *Glow: The Dermatologist’s Guide to a Whole Foods Younger Skin Diet*. Dr. Katta recommended that rosacea sufferers keep three things in mind before they upped their coffee consumption.

“First, be careful with your coffee. You certainly don’t want it too hot, but you also have to make sure you’re not adding a lot of sugar and cream, because that can add up quickly and lead to other health effects. Second, some people are clearly far more sensitive to the effects of caffeine, so always keep that in mind,” she said.

“And finally, make sure you have all of the basics of rosacea prevention down. This includes the use of sun

protection and the use of strategies to prevent overheating, such as avoiding long hot showers. It also means that you need to really pay attention to food and beverage triggers for rosacea.”

In 2016, the National Rosacea Society awarded Dr. Li \$25,000 as part of its research grants program to increase knowledge and understanding of the causes and other key aspects of rosacea that may lead to improvements in its management, prevention or potential cure. Dr. Li and colleagues are conducting a study to clarify how hormone use and hormone levels associated with menopause and during pregnancy may affect the risk of developing rosacea.

Helpful References

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