

# REAL SIMPLE

## How to Treat Milia, The Small White Bumps On Your Face

It's not your typical acne.

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Updated on March 6, 2023

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If you're following your dermatologist's advice, you should be giving yourself regular skin checks. This allows us to notice small or significant coloring changes, texture, and other characteristics of our body's largest organ, i.e. our skin. Though many people are on the lookout for the first indications of cancer, you may also notice other bumps along the way. Enter: milia face bumps, a pesky skin condition that is not exactly acne and much more common than you might think. We spoke with a board-certified dermatologist to better understand the signs and, more importantly, the treatments.

### What are milia face bumps?

They're so small and so faint, they're almost undetectable, but that doesn't make them any less annoying. Typically one to three millimeters in size, milia face bumps are white or yellow microcysts that thrive just under the surface of the skin, according to **Maxine F. Warren, M.D., FAAD, a board-certified dermatologist at [Dermatology of the Rockies](#)**, in Longmont, Colo. She says they are often located in the facial regions, especially around the eyelids and cheeks. However, she also notes they may occur anywhere on the body, including genital areas. "They are often confused for whiteheads, a subtype of acne, but truly they are infundibular cysts unrelated to acne."

### How common are milia face bumps?

If you've ever admired a newborn baby in your arms, you may have noticed teeny white bumps on their face. Likely, this was milia. In fact, **Dr. Warren** says up to 50 percent of babies experience this skin condition during the first month of their life.<sup>1</sup> Usually, it goes away on its own, without treatment. For adults, Dr. Warren says there is no reliable data about the prevalence of milia, but she says it's a fairly common complaint in her practice, affecting any age group and race.

### What causes milia face bumps?

There are two types of milia: primary and secondary. For the former, **Dr. Warren** explains milia bumps occur when sloughed skin cells build up and get trapped in the deepest layer of skin (the dermis) and form a small cyst. On the other hand, secondary milia may occur during the healing phases of burns, rare blistering, or inflammatory diseases.<sup>2</sup> "They may also occur as a response to other trauma to the skin, including cosmetic procedures such as chemical peels or ablative lasers. Milia may also develop as the skin loses its natural ability to exfoliate as a result of aging," she notes.

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### How can you treat milia face bumps?

If you notice these pesky bumps popping up on your face or your newborn's, it's always best to speak to your dermatologist about options. However, these are some of the more common ways professionals recommend tackling the problem at home.

Try exfoliation.

The key to preventing milia is exfoliation, **Dr. Warren** explains, since ultimately, they are caused by trapped dead skin cells. Many at-home treatments could benefit your pores and maximize cell turnaround, including topical retinoids, alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs), or beta hydroxy acids (BHAs). Check the back label for ingredients, and test on a small portion of your skin before applying across your face to avoid irritation.

In a dermatologist or trained medical aesthetician's office, extraction is the most commonly used tool for intense milia. He or she may use a sterile needle or blade to nick the skin overlying the milium to allow an exit tunnel for the trapped keratin protein. Then, she explains they will apply pressure with an extractor or cotton-tipped applicators to pop it out. The most common side effect of this treatment is a temporary bruise from the stress, she warns.

Avoid thick creams or oil-based products.

Another tip to avoid these bumps is to shy away from thick creams or oil-based products in milia-prone areas, especially around the eyes. "Many creams are too thick for the eyelids, where the outermost layer of the skin is the thinnest on the body, so it is important to use products specific to the instructed area to prevent buildup," she says.

Limit excessive sun exposure.

Lastly, **Dr. Warren** says to avoid excessive exposure to the sun and smoking, both of which can result over decades in abundant milia and blackheads on the cheeks and neck, a phenomenon called Favre-Racouchot syndrome.