

Rosacea: A common but under-recognized disorder

By Kenneth D. Osorio, M.D.

Rosacea (pronounced roh-ZAY-sha) is a common but often misunderstood disorder causing redness, dilated blood vessels and pimples on the face. Rosacea affects an estimated 14 million American adults, and most of them don't know it. In fact, despite the fact that rosacea is becoming more widespread, as the baby boomers enter the most susceptible ages, a Gallup survey found that 78 percent of Americans have no knowledge of this condition, including how to recognize it or what to do about it. It is sometimes mistakenly referred to as "adult acne," despite the fact that there is much more to the disorder than the unsightly pimples that can appear on the face.

Why should we bother to learn about rosacea? In recent surveys by the National Rosacea Society, nearly 70 percent of rosacea patients said this condition had lowered their self-confidence and self-esteem, and 41 percent reported it had caused them to avoid public contact or cancel social engagements. One reason for the embarrassment is a common myth that rosacea sufferers, who often have

a red face and nose, are alcoholics. In fact, while alcohol may aggravate rosacea, the symptoms can be just as severe in a teetotaler. Furthermore, another misconception is that the bumps and discoloration of the skin are

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caused by poor hygiene, while in reality the disorder is completely unrelated to personal cleanliness. These myths unfortunately inflict real emotional and social damage on its victims. In fact, 70 percent of patients with severe symptoms said the disorder had adversely affected their professional interactions

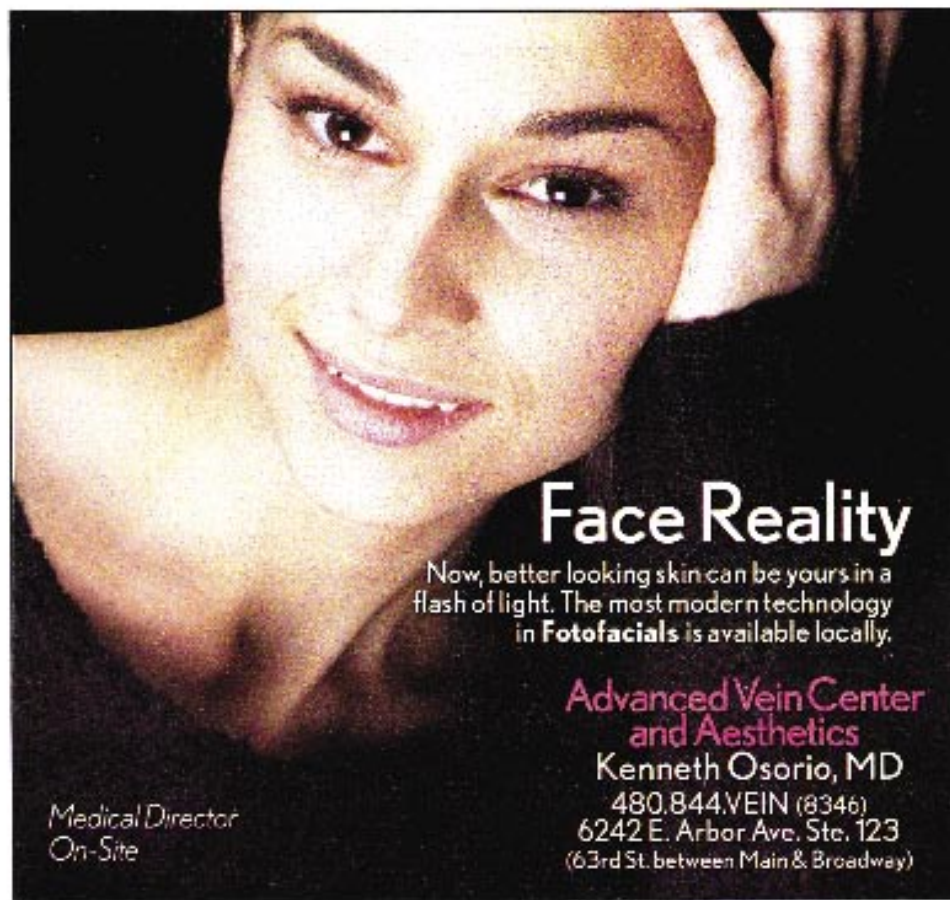
and even caused them to miss work because of the embarrassing facial flushing or visible bumps on the face.

So what does a person with rosacea look like? One classic example is W.C. Fields. Remember his ruddy cheeks covered with small red bumps, the dilated blood vessels on a large bulbous nose? Fields actually had a rather advanced case of rosacea, which caused his nose to enlarge and deform and become covered by thick bumps – a condition called rhinophyma. Other famous rosacea sufferers include former president Bill Clinton and Princess Diana. Their rosacea was more moderate with redness on the cheeks, nose and chin. Typically, symptoms begin after age 30, and over time the redness becomes ruddier and more persistent and visible blood vessels may appear. Left untreated, bumps and pimples develop and, in advanced cases, the nose may grow swollen and lumpy from excess tissue. Almost half of patients experience facial discomfort or itching.

Unfortunately, in its early stages, people frequently confuse rosacea with other conditions such as acne or sun damage. As timely treatment can stop the progress of rosacea, it is important to diagnose this condition early.

Treatment options are varied. Topical or oral antibiotics may help with the pimples or bumps. Often, however, patients are more concerned with the flushing and redness, which can worsen at times of stress. Unfortunately, traditional prescribed medicines do little to help with this redness. However, vascular lasers and intense pulsed light therapy are highly effective in improving the ruddy color and are providing new hope to rosacea sufferers. Although this requires a series of treatments, laser or light treatment can help turn back the clock for many frustrated rosacea sufferers. Cortisone creams have also been used to treat the redness of rosacea but should not be used for longer than two weeks, as cortisone can thin the skin.

While there is no cure for rosacea, the good news is that with early treatment, rosacea can be effectively controlled. For this reason, it is essential for anyone with signs of rosacea to seek treatment early, before the condition reaches more serious stages.



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