

Dermatologically Tested Podcast - 13. Adolescent skin with Dr Tess McPherson

Matt Gass 0:14

Welcome to Dermatologically Tested, the podcast of the British Association of Dermatologists. Today's episode is all about adolescent skin.

Harriet Dalwood 0:21

It's going to be a good subject, I think to cover. I mean, we've all been adolescents at some point in our life. And I imagine that the conversation will naturally lean towards acne, but there are plenty of other skin conditions that we will cover in this.

Matt Gass 0:35

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's going to be, hopefully, really interesting, really useful and we all know how difficult adolescence can be and how your skin just never quite does what you want it to.

Harriet Dalwood 0:48

No not at all.

Matt Gass 0:49

So it's gonna be really good to dig into that and it's also just a really tricky time, I think with peers. And,

Harriet Dalwood 0:54

Hormones,

Matt Gass 0:55

Yeah, it can be difficult. I think people can be quite cruel to adolescents.

Harriet Dalwood 1:00

Oh, absolutely.

Matt Gass 1:01

There's so much pressure about how you look, I certainly think you go from childhood, where there's no real expectation in terms of presentation, and suddenly possibly the most pressurised time in your life for something like that. It would be really good to chat about this. So perhaps without further ado, we'll meet our guests. Our guest today is Dr Tess McPherson, clinical lead paediatric and adolescent dermatology and senior clinical lecturer at Oxford University Hospitals. She's also the author of How to Be comfortable in your skin and evidence

based Practical Guide for young people, which will be published later this year by Oxford University Press, Tess, Welcome.

Dr Tess McPherson 1:39

Hi, thank you so much for having me.

Harriet Dalwood 1:41

Oh, it's a pleasure. I'm really interested to find out more about this subject and I guess we'll just get right to it. Why are adolescents more susceptible to dermatological issues?

Dr Tess McPherson 1:53

So adolescence, starting puberty, going through puberty, through your teens and 20s is a time of massive physical, emotional and mental change. It's also a time when there's a big focus on how you look, your appearance and importance of acceptance. So, skin conditions are really common in this group, and it's also time where you can be quite vulnerable to coping or having a skin condition.

Matt Gass 2:16

Yeah, definitely. I think that's a really important point to raise. I mean, I think lots of people will be familiar with that tricky period where your body doesn't quite do what you want it to do. And, you know, I think peers can be quite cruel sometimes and so it's really good to talk about in terms of the most common problems that teenagers tend to have with their skin, and we're talking about teenagers, Aren't we here? It would actually be good to clarify what sort of age group this tends to start at.

Dr Tess McPherson 2:46

Yeah, so it's really variable, we know that the age of puberty is quite variable, but it seems to be happening a bit earlier than it used to. Probably the period that medically is called adolescence, I mean, it's probably defined best as starting puberty until the time you're an independent adult and you know, that's changed as well over the past few decades, because people are getting married, having children and leaving home later for various reasons. So it's not really specific, it's kind of developmentally specific, but it's a time of big hormonal flux and lots of life changes. So you know, the age is not completely specific, but probably covers from, 10, 11, right through to the mid 20s.

Matt Gass 3:23

That's really interesting. I think that's good to clear up as well because, yeah, it's very easy to have a fixed period. I mean, I suppose it people draw on their own experience in a way and picture how they were at a certain age. In terms of the common dermatological complaints that people have, the issues that people have with their skin, what are the most significant or the most common?

Dr Tess McPherson 3:45

So really common, I mean, everyone will know this, is spots and this has to do with hormonal pubertal changes, and nearly every teenager gets spots, or more severe spots, or acne to some degree, and again, as in females, this can last into their 20s, but most people recognise that your teens is a time when you get spots. So probably almost 100% of people will have spot for and skin or spots in this time. I think other really important conditions are things like eczema, which a lot of people expect to grow out of, but you know, that doesn't happen and that can be really troublesome to have eczema ongoing into your teens and, you know, a significant proportion of young people who have eczema, 15 20%, The other really important conditions are the lifelong conditions that you might have all through your life that develop at this vulnerable age, that includes things like alopecia, vitiligo, psoriasis, and Hidradenitis. So, lots and although there's a less common sort of two 3% of young people, that's still a really important time to be getting a skin condition which you might have to cope with or deal with for a longer time.

Harriet Dalwood 4:48

That's really interesting that those lifelong conditions tend to develop during that age period. What sort of advice would you not typically give those people Like we've talked about is such a vulnerable age.

Dr Tess McPherson 4:49

So it does really depend on the skin condition and I guess that's why for acne, there's lots of good treatments and I know that you've done podcasts already on the subject. Eczema, I think it's about getting on top of something you might have had for a while, or might have been better, but has got worse and really just making sure you know, this age is a time of like getting more in control of yourself and more in control of a skin. So, getting the information you need, trying to be involved and engaged in your own kind of skincare, that'll be important for any condition. I think getting used to the idea that you might have a more chronic condition can be really difficult, and does require getting the right kind of support medically, but also mostly dealing with other people, but dealing with yourself, those are all really important aspects to focus on.

Matt Gass 5:48

Yeah, absolutely. We have touched upon acne before in previous episodes, but it would be good just to talk a little bit about the spectrum of acne, because obviously, it does range from a handful of spots, if you're lucky, to what can be a much more severe condition that can actually have a huge impact on your self-esteem. Not to say that the severity of acne is always tied to the impact on your self-esteem, it can be very mild and have a big impact and vice versa. At what point, in terms of the advice for teenagers, what is the process that they should be moving through, going from self-care through to it being a genuine medical issue that requires speaking to a GP, or whatever it might be?

Dr Tess McPherson 6:32

Well, I think you're completely right Matt, it doesn't necessarily depend on how bad it is, it is how bad it is for you. Always trying to get that into perspective and working out what you think is normal, as in what you see on social media, or more publicly is not always normal. It is normal to get a few spots and that's absolutely fine and you don't necessarily have to do much more than just do a very basic skincare regime. I think some of the important myths are that people don't get spots because they've got dirty skin, or they're not looking after themselves better, or they have a bad diet, or they're particularly stressed. That really goes for all skin conditions, although there are benefits to eating a healthy diet and trying to be healthy, you don't get a skin condition through anything you've done wrong or not done, right. I think that's a really important thing, the amount of young people who will think it's their fault, even if they don't clearly express that. That's a very important thing I focus on in my clinic but in terms of how to treat your acne, keeping your face clean, some sort of regime for just washing your face is important but absolutely, you can wear makeup, you don't have to not wear makeup. In terms of diet, having a healthy diet is good, but people with very healthy diets can still get spots and there is some work that high dairy diets and what we call high glycaemic diets, that's kind of high fat sugar diets can make some people more spot prone but generally, those are things that might not change everyone's skin, and they might not have a massive benefit.

If you've got spots that are causing problems, even if it's just causing problems to you, then it's always worth getting some advice. But certainly if you've got deep under the skin spot, cystic spots, spots that are causing scarring, then there are you know, really effective treatments that can be got on prescription from your GP or possibly from dermatology.

Harriet Dalwood 8:21

That's really great to know. I mean, you touched on routines in your answer. Is there any advice that you would normally give to adolescents in general, when they are trying to take care of their skin? Are there any routines you suggest or anything that they should avoid actively?

Matt Gass 8:39

Yeah, I think this is really interesting, because I think particularly for adolescents who are perhaps, this is maybe the first time in their life they're starting to use deodorant, and the concept of a skincare routine is not something that they've ever had to think about. I mean, yeah, some basic tips would be fantastic.

Dr Tess McPherson 8:56

Find something that's relatively simple that you can keep doing and isn't going to be a massive issue and so if you have a day, when you're busy, it doesn't work out, and that goes for any skin condition, it's not the end of the world and all skin is different, so it will depend on the type of skin you've got, whether you've got the kind skin that tends towards dryness with you've got really greasy skin. So, you're going to have to find products, and there are absolutely loads available. It's hard to be really specific, but I would say that buying something really expensive is not going to be any more beneficial for the most part and making sure that if you've have got active ingredients that you're getting them from somewhere that has the right amount of

active ingredients to actually be effective. Any wash products that that suits you and again there are plenty available and they generally are labelled quite usefully so if you go into any kind of chemist there will be certainly be products more suitable for spot tone skin.

A lot of the products that are labelled non-comedogenic will be helpful if you're someone that is more spot prone. The other important thing about most spot treatment or acne treatment is they generally work to prevent spots, not treat spots, so they do have to be used to some degree ongoing to spot prone areas to try and make you less spot prone going into the future. I think that the common misunderstanding is that you just dapped them onto the actual spots was really their best used on all your spot prone skin on an ongoing basis. But even if you can only do that a couple of nights a week, that's going to be probably beneficial.

Matt Gass 10:26

There is obviously a huge market targeting teenagers and young people and I do see articles talking about this and conversations online talking about how the pressure to engage with using cosmetics and anti-ageing treatments starting earlier and earlier and earlier. I guess my question is. is this something that adolescents should be worrying about that much? I mean, do they need to moisturise regularly but do they need to do anything beyond that?

Dr Tess McPherson 10:57

I mean, you know, It's a really good time to get into some sort of healthy habits because we know that if you get into healthy habits in your teens, they are likely to last your lifetime. So yeah, keeping your skin moisturised can certainly help it from dryness so just one simple moisturiser and probably, Particularly if you have fair skin that can get more prone to ageing, but we're talking hopefully in the future then you know, getting some protection, to some degree, or not getting sunburned is really important and not smoking. So, smoking is something which we know ages your skin more than anything else. So moisturise, some protection to some degree, or at least not getting sunburned and not using sunbeds and avoiding smoking are probably three really lifelong healthy habits you can do for your skin. I agree, I think it's really worrying if people are thinking about anti-ageing treatments when they're not yet old. We do know that for instance, people wanting plastic surgery, people want to Botox is becoming younger and younger. That doesn't feel like a very healthy move because yes, look after skin, yes, manage your skin as well as you can, but trying to do really quite probably unnecessarily and quite dramatic things your skin really don't seem necessary for this age group.

Matt Gass 12:19

I think that's a great message, the lifestyle changes, if that's something you're concerned about, then you've really got to focus on lifestyle changes. I'm always happy when a guest mentions sun protection, I try and get it into almost every podcast so yeah, use sun protection.

Harriet Dalwood 12:34

Perfect. I was going to say, I remember back in school, even when I was in school, and this was before we had social media, but not to the extent that we have social media now. I remember

girls in my class in year 10 talking about anti-ageing cream, and I was like, I don't think we need to do that.

Dr Tess McPherson 12:54

I know, sort of a loss of innocence, isn't it, but you know, it's always going to be a personal choice, but you can do more to protect your skin and get into good habits, then start using things which, if needed at all, shouldn't be considered until you're a bit older, I would say,

Harriet Dalwood 13:12

I know that teenagers are kind of obsessed, while they are mostly obsessed with Tiktok and the fads that seem to kick off. Have you seen any that you're like, oh, no, don't be doing that.

Dr Tess McPherson 13:27

There are plenty of websites devoted to squeezing spots, and pimple popping and things, and I mean, they're good to watch, but probably be a little bit careful with your own skin. I mean, if you've got a really large pimple spot, then it's probably okay to squeeze it, but generally picking at very small spots or trying to get rid of every little blemish on your skin is just going to lead to problems both for your mental state and also for your skin. Picking and squeezing everything tiny will just lead to more chance of potential marks and scars but it is really important to stress that acne can scar if you don't touch it. The number of patients that come in and go I honestly don't touch my skin, I don't squeeze it, but you know, I'm getting scars. So, it's removing that kind of blame because you can look after your skin as well as anyone can, you can still be spot prone, you can still get spots, you can still get scarring but generally again, over treating, picking squeezing those things is probably not that helpful.

There's a lot of really good stuff you know, there's a guy on Tiktok who nearly all my patients have seen who does actually give quite sensible advice. He's not pharma sponsored and he does give individual advice to young people and I know they can find that sort of support really helpful and you learn from each other as well, they often share tips and tricks which they've found helpful. It is important to remember your skin is going to be different from other people's skin and what works for them might not be perfect for you.

Matt Gass 14:55

Absolutely, yeah, I think it is important within a world of Social media where there can be trends or there can be tips and stuff, I think that's a good way of getting support and advice.

Harriet Dalwood 15:08

I guess fact checking some hacks would be good for teenagers. I think it's really great that there are dermatologists who are really fantastic at giving advice but then some of the more faddy trends that I've seen, like people putting teabags all over their face and stuff like that. I think for teenagers, it's probably good, before they go and do stuff that they see online, just do a Google and make sure that it's okay to do, or safe to do for your skin. Would you say?

Dr Tess McPherson 15:34

Yeah, and I think there is so much stuff out there and it's about trying to get through it and know what to trust, and that is a process that we all have to do with the internet, and there will be a lot of things that are selling themselves as one thing, anything that claims to be a miracle or a wonder I would be a bit suspicious of, so yes, you definitely would want to, the information is there, so there are more trusted sites, and there are more, probably less faddy advice that may well have absolutely no facts behind it at all. So yeah, anything that's wanting to charge you a lot of money, I'd be deeply suspicious off because, again, cheap things like tea bags, or some of the things I hear are also probably not very evidence based.

Matt Gass 16:20

Yeah, absolutely

Dr Tess McPherson 16:21

If you find something that helps you and it's not costing you too much money, and it's helping you in any way, then I don't think it's the end of the world. But yeah, there are certainly lots of things that would not be advisable.

Matt Gass 16:31

Yeah, I think that's sensible advice, and is a realistic way of looking at it. We can't expect teenagers to be trawling through academic journals to fact check things they see on Tiktok, but take things with a pinch of salt, have a sceptical approach, some healthy scepticism anyway, I would say is sensible and any extraordinary claims, they probably need to be evidenced. So, we've talked quite a bit about social media. But I think it's really important, it'd be good to just get your views on how you think social media has impacted the view that teenagers and adolescents have about their own skin, and do you have thoughts in terms of, It may be asking quite a lot of you to answer this but, do you think there's more that can be done by social media platforms to protect young people?

Dr Tess McPherson 17:14

I mean, definitely, there's more that can, I mean, social media has positives as well as negatives,

Matt Gass 17:20

Absolutely

Dr Tess McPherson 17:20

And I think that's to remember, I mean, we've already just talked about the fact that people can access really useful information and really useful support through social media, I think there are clear negatives, it's certainly somewhere where young people see an abnormal sense of normal, so they think that skin should look a certain way which even if they know isn't true, if that's continually coming at you, and everyone else is posting this picture perfect skin, it can make you feel that your skin isn't perfect and I think there's certainly a sense of how your image should be, and that can be exhausting, and can make you feel very vulnerable because

you have to project this perfect life and perfect skin. And we know is a place where people with skin conditions of all sorts can get mean comments, and that's not helpful at all.

We also, as we've discussed, it's a place, where there could be some really false information. Also, just to stress some positives, it is also a source of good quality information, if you can work out where to get it. A lot of young people are actually very good at navigating these areas, so they do find reliable and trustworthy sources, and they do find support. Also, there are really good support, actual resources there. So, some of the charities have really good resources. I was involved in something called Health talk, which is young people talking about their experiences of skin disease, you can just access other people's experiences quite easily. I know a lot of people can also use it as a way to project their own image. So, we have lots of examples of people with skin conditions who use social media, to just say, look, I've got alopecia and I'm okay, and that's really helpful for them and for other people. What can social media do?, I mean, we have to remember that they work to make their platforms addictive, and we are kind of their product and they're not gonna stop doing that. So, one thing they could stop doing would be to stop making it such an addictive place to spend time on, but as long as you recognise, that's kind of what they're doing and then you have a say, and whether they do that to you and how you spend your time on it, then I think you can control that a little bit better.

They probably should respond to any reports of cyber bullying more quickly, and I think that probably is something they should do. I mean, again, as you said, it's a difficult thing for me to answer particularly and it does realm into the politics. I think removing people being able to say mean things anonymously as well would be something which would stop a lot of mean comments for all types of things, but you know, including people with skin conditions, but we can all kind of understand our role in social media and try and educate ourselves so we use it in a positive, rather than negative way.

Matt Gass 19:49

I absolutely agree with that. Yeah, I think the challenge is, moderation and stuff like that are really complicated and it's hard, it's beyond the scope of this podcast to perhaps delve into that. I definitely think that individuals should do what they can to make social media a positive place rather than a negative place and go in with their eyes open and just be mindful that there is misinformation out there. There's also, as you say, to some brilliant sources of information, I think you mentioned some of the groups where people can talk amongst themselves and share experiences and I think that's really helpful for patients. I think the benefit of sometimes not always talking to an expert, but actually talking to somebody who's experienced the condition first-hand, is really helpful and obviously, the BAD has patient information leaflets, which answer a lot of questions, the British Skin Foundation has lots of information, the NHS digital on their websites also have lots of good information so there are plenty of sources for things like this, I suppose people keeping their eyes open.

Dr Tess McPherson 20:50

Yeah, and so not just learning which bits to use, but when to use it as well. It's not helpful to be on your phone all night, we know that getting a good night's sleep is really important for your health and your skin, just knowing when to turn it off, and when to spend time doing other

things, which can also make you feel good, and we know that one of the big impacts of spending a lot of time on social media or on devices is that you lose out on time to do other things, outside activities, exercise things, which can also positively impact your health. It's knowing when to do it, when it's not do it, and what you find helpful, so owning your time on it and your profile on it, because as you said that, sharing your experiences, sharing your vulnerabilities that is a form of strength and it can be a really important place for true connections. But it's also a place where you can get bad connections and bad advice so it's about balancing it.

Matt Gass 21:40

Yeah, definitely.

Harriet Dalwood 21:41

Why do you think it is so important to talk to teenagers and adolescents about their skin?

Dr Tess McPherson 21:47

I think it's something that we know; we all remember and think about a lot. So it's just making that area open for them and we also know that young people don't always feel comfortable seeking medical help and so I always tell health workers that it can be a big deal for them to go and ask for help and advice so that you really want to make that somewhere they can speak comfortably, and to be sort of non-judgmental about their concerns but also if they have got, as Matt said, very few spots, but they're very worried about them also putting that into a kind of a real place and remembering that that normal is not completely unblemished, never having a sport or a patch of dry skin. It's making sure that young people can express their concerns, making sure they know there are effective treatments for most skin conditions, and also addressing the impact it has on them. So, understanding that, any skin condition can have a big impact and it's not necessarily how severe it is, but often it will be but understanding that that's the side that has to be addressed as well, looking after yourself working out have to be mentally comfortable as well as physically comfortable.

Matt Gass 22:55

Yeah, I think one of the things that I feel, you know, I could be wrong, but anecdotally, it feels to me, like we're making progress and maybe that there's less obsession with people not appearing vain. I remember, for me growing up, I definitely felt competing pressures of wanting to look good, but not wanting to appear vain. and I think that it's really easy, when you're young to think you're not going to be taken seriously, particularly if it might be purely cosmetic, but if there's a cosmetic element to it, that's making you unhappy, so like spots, that might be a medical issue, but also has a cosmetic presentation that takes how you look, it can be really challenging, asking for help and you know, not wanting to appear overly vain, or not wanting people to make jokes at your expense about chasing girls or whatever it may be. I do think it's good that actually, perhaps people are less afraid of that side of things. But I do think it's still a pressure, a competing pressure with this need to look good.

Dr Tess McPherson 24:04

And not look like you care.

Matt Gass 24:05

Yeah exactly, effortlessly good looking, {laughs} that's what we're aiming for. But it's an impossible task.

Dr Tess McPherson 24:14

I think it is, but I think is a very positive movement. But I think also, there is something attractive about someone that doesn't care so much and I think that does show the importance of not getting not being too hard on yourself really so finding out things that you enjoy doing that might not be completely focused on your visual appearance and working out how that can also make you feel good, and that can generally make you more okay with any skin issues that you're dealing with.

Matt Gass 24:46

Absolutely. One thing we want to touch upon is within the medical setting, do you think there's a need for specialist adolescent services or do you think that's something that can equally be served by generalist services?

Dr Tess McPherson 25:01

I think you know whether you have special services or not, you have to appreciate and understand that this is a time of life which is really different from paediatrics, children, and adults. So I think specialty services can certainly fill that need appropriately if they're designed well, there was some really interesting work done on a renal clinic about 15 years ago, where they set up, these are young people that were having have kidney transplants and they set up a specialist clinic for this age group because they were seeing a lot of them were not engaging with the health services and not taking the medications and actually then rejecting these organ transplants. So sets up this special service which had support for this age group, completely reduced the rejection of organs. So, that was a really clear way of measuring just how a specialist service could have a massive impact. It's a little bit more tricky to measure it in some other specialties, but we know that it really can have a positive impact, and certainly in dermatology, is something that I've been developing and is now more national and clinics which do serve this age group more specifically.

We are seeing good outcomes. And again, like you said Harriet, a space where young people can be listened to, not just for their skin problems, but for their emotional problems. We did some work looking at the interviews on the website I talked about, called Health talk, picking out some of the messages young people had for health workers, and whatever skin condition you were struggling with the two really strong messages that came out from that was what they want from health workers is to provide more information and to address the emotional impact. So, I think, even if you don't have a designated service, as long as you can do those two things, as long as you can give appropriate, developmentally appropriate information on the skin condition, and making sure that your understanding of this will have an emotional impact and addressing it in some way, then that seems really important.

Harriet Dalwood 26:53

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's the emotional impact, I think it's such an important part of any skin problem or skin condition or skin complaint, as a teenager or going into your early mid-20s. I know that I've definitely had problems with acne myself in my teenage years. And yeah, the emotional impact, like what Matt said, as well, you're like, am I being vain? Or is this normal? Is this amount of acne normal? Or is this actually acne? It is hard to feel comfortable talking about it. But the fact that obviously, people are now, like we talked about the benefits of social media, they do have these groups where people can talk about it. and compare pictures, I know, there are a lot of influencers who have acne, and they take pictures of their face, fully makeup free, are about being acne positive, and all that and it's just really like, reassuring to see. So that part of it and like being more open and having an open dialogue with other people online and also your parents or a medical professional, I think that's so important.

Dr Tess McPherson 28:04

Yeah, and often just feels better to say that it's bothering you and then that's a start to do what you can to help or realise what things just aspects of you and your skin that you have to, not accepting or kind of accepting unacceptable things, but accepting that that we are all different, that normal skin is not one thing and that we can exist in many different types of skins. And then again, normally the person that's cruellest is you yourself, and you're the one that's normally the meanest to you, and has the high expectations of you and your skin than anyone else.

Matt Gass 28:43

Yeah, I absolutely agree with that. You're always going to be the first one that notices a blemish or whatever it may be, and something that's really obvious to you, because you're standing right in front of a mirror, looking closely and carefully. It's just not going to be necessarily obvious to other people. Obviously, there is severe skin disease, and there is a spectrum.

Dr Tess McPherson 29:03

Absolutely.

Matt Gass 29:03

This idea that something like acne or whatever it may be, I mean, we've discussed about the fact that adolescence can often be a time where you first start to have problems that might be chronic, might last the rest of your life, but also I think things like acne, we often see them as a condition, which affects adolescents and the problem with that, I suppose, is that it sets people up to feel really bad when it doesn't go away as they get older. I think something like acne can definitely go into your 20s and your 30s and particularly in women, it can reoccur later in life

Dr Tess McPherson 29:51

Oh completely.

Matt Gass 29:52

So yeah, it'd be good to get your views on that.

Dr Tess McPherson 29:54

I completely agree, and I think it's a little bit like eczema, I think if people have expectations, it's just something they are going to have in their childhood, and then it's hanging around in their adolescence, which we know is common, then they'll feel they've done something wrong or that there is something wrong and also you'll feel kind of angry because it's not what you expected to happen. The same with acne, although the majority of spots or acne are worse in teenage years, and particularly for males, as you said, it can be something which carries on, and I think that's doubly disappointing because you feel like you're dealing with other things as you get into your 20s and 30s. Then you still got spots which you should have, hopefully have got rid of in your teens and we know again, that that's not the case that there's a significant proportion of people will still be spot prone into their 20s and 30s and maybe for life. So yeah, it is important to understand that although these skin conditions have certain impacts at certain ages, they are not always defined to those age groups, and a lot of them will continue beyond, frustratingly and disappointingly.

Matt Gass 30:51

Yeah, sadly, life isn't quite so neat as to compartmentalise everything.

Dr Tess McPherson 30:55

We do know that the public can be really unpleasant and unfair to people with skin conditions, and there is a stigma that does come from other people. I think it's it is different, that can be really difficult to deal with, you know, part of your past, part of the work is to highlight skin conditions, and how, as public, we should be kind of kinder to people with skin diseases. And again, some of the influencers and young people who do bear their skin and share their vulnerabilities are part of this process, I think.

Matt Gass 31:27

Absolutely, I think one thing that I think's been really powerful is, dermatologists even talking about skin issues, I think we've had lots of dermatologists who I've talked to who've been very open about issues they have had, it shows you that you know, if having perfect skin was something that is within your control and easy to make happen, then there wouldn't be any dermatologists with skin issues, but that's not the reality.

Dr Tess McPherson 31:50

My children always blame me for any skin issues they get. They think I should sort them all out straightaway.

Matt Gass 31:57

It is a shame we can't just wave that magic wand.

Dr Tess McPherson 31:59

I know, I think there are some skin issues which are really difficult to live with, you know, and it's often even the hidden ones. So psoriasis, although it's a pretty common disease is often hidden, because it's often in the areas that are protected by clothing, or people with psoriasis or workloads to cover up their skin, which does seem really sad, because it's not something which people would mind looking at or should mind looking at it. But I did have one young patient described her psoriasis as her dirty little secret, which just makes you feel so sad that it's something that she feels she has to keep to herself in that way. I guess we do know that some of these skin conditions cannot just impact you in your teens, but have an impact on the whole way you live your life, which is one of the other really important reasons why we should talk about skin to this age group and provide the appropriate support for that.

Matt Gass 32:48

Yeah, I completely agree, I think it's devastating when people with skin disease say that they can't live their lives as normal, or they feel they can't live their lives of normal. Maybe they stopped doing things they enjoy because, you know, for example, maybe sports or swimming because they want to be able to hide the signs of their skin disease. That's a real tangible benefit of people being open. You know, it's not for everybody being open about skin disease, I completely understand that I don't want to set expectations and say that everybody should be doing this if they're not comfortable with it, but I do think it's a tangible benefit when high profile people are open about their skin issues, and comfortable showing the effects it can have, it can help young people, maybe, be less intimidated by doing things.

Dr Tess McPherson 32:53

Absolutely.

Matt Gass 33:19

But then, you know, put themselves out there, it is intimidating.

Dr Tess McPherson 33:37

It is but I suppose if it's making you not do something, then in the end, you're the one that's suffering, which is as you said Matt, easier said than done. But if it's meaning you're not going to go swimming, something you enjoy, something which makes you feel good, and you're not doing that anymore, then I'm worried about you, and the impact on you. I don't care about the other people at the swimming pool, and in a way it's moving towards that place where you can make sure that you're not losing your life through avoiding things. So, you can get into a kind of avoidance trap where you stop doing things which you enjoy, even when there's no reason to. I mean, there are times, when your eczema was really bad and you feel rubbish and your skin is really itchy, you don't want to do anything and that's totally understandable.

There are times when you end up avoiding things, I know young people end up avoiding things that they want to do and then they just miss out on so many opportunities. So, it's kind of trying to stop that as early as you can. I think it's interesting, the celebrities, because I know from some of my patients that yes, that is helpful, but also, there's a kind of mismatch in

expectations. So a model with vitiligo, she's beautiful, so they'll go well, I've got vitiligo but I'm not beautiful. So, it can have an impact both ways. I think it's yeah, it's a start of a positive process of acceptance of lots of being different in lots of ways, but it certainly doesn't always make people feel brilliant or they'll think that the Kardashians have got rid of their psoriasis because they've got more money than them. So, there are some complexities there, but certainly, yeah, it's a positive start.

Matt Gass 35:04

Yeah I think that's a really good caveat to raise. It's never completely straightforward and simple. Thanks for mentioning that.

Harriet Dalwood 35:10

Yeah, that's a really important point, but I guess just starting to open the dialogue, it's a good starting point, as you said, I think more probably does need to be done, but we're getting there, hopefully,

Dr Tess McPherson 35:23

I think we are, and I think these conversations are helping. I think that, again, understanding that feeling down and feeling worried about yourself is also something that is very common, and something that you can get support with, if it's really having an impact on you. That sort of dialogue about not wanting to just be strong and cope all the time and that feeling vulnerable, feeling sensitive is okay and is also a really important part of this.

Matt Gass 35:50

So Tess, what would you say to doctors, healthcare professionals who are interested in learning a little bit more about how they can support adolescent patients?

Dr Tess McPherson 35:59

So we've tried to put together, there's a resource section on the British Society of Paediatric Dermatology, which is part of the Association of Dermatology, and on the BSPD website, we've got a section on adolescent dermatology, including information on how to set up a clinic, but also all the resources for young people. There's also going to be a section at the World Congress of Paediatric Dermatology, which is due to be held in Edinburgh this year in September and as a whole, I mean, this is going to be a fantastic conference but there's a whole section on adolescent dermatology at this conference, there's plenty of resources for health workers as well. And as I said, we've also just published this work in BMJ open on what young people want from health workers and the two requests from young people to health workers were to give more information and to address the emotional impact.

Matt Gass 36:46

Yeah, addressing the emotional impact is really important. I know that you've mentioned that in your service for young people in Oxford, you have open access to a psychologist to help with the emotional impact of their condition, and to help with the management of their skin, which I think is brilliant, and definitely something that I'd like to see emulated around the country. It's

a really great initiative. Well, I think that's a perfect note to finish on. Thank you so much for joining us today Tess, you were fantastic. I'm sure that everything you said today will be really helpful to young people, so thank you,

Dr Tess McPherson 37:14

Thank you so much.

Harriet Dalwood 37:15

Well, thanks to our fantastic guest, Dr Tess McPherson, that was really eye opening.

Matt Gass 37:20

Yeah, it was a really good episode, I think Tess has got a lot of really helpful things to say and obviously cares about communicating with young people and teenagers and communicating with other healthcare professionals about how to provide dermatology advice and services with adolescents. It is really challenging, as we talked about having to deal with some of the changes that you deal with during your teenage years and beyond. So I thought that was really interesting. I really enjoyed our chat about social media. I know in some cases, we were perhaps in over our head.

Harriet Dalwood 37:53

Absolutely.

Matt Gass 37:54

But you know, it's good to touch on it and talk about it, the positives and the negatives. Just a really fun interesting episode, I think.

Harriet Dalwood 38:03

Yeah, absolutely.

Matt Gass 38:04

And unsurprisingly, we did focus quite a lot on acne, as we predicted, but I thought Tess did a good job, she touched on psoriasis and alopecia and other skin conditions like that, and it's easy to single out acne because it's so common, and it's such a common experience, but I do think it's helpful laying down something that people can relate to, but yeah, really interesting. So what's coming up next?

Harriet Dalwood 38:27

Well, in two weeks' time, we will be talking about dermatology and the environment, so please do join us.

Matt Gass 38:33

Fantastic, talking about in over our heads

Harriet Dalwood 38:36

[Laughs]

Matt Gass 38:36

And talk about tackling big subjects. I can't wait.

Harriet Dalwood 38:38

I mean, it's going to be great. It's going to be a good one.