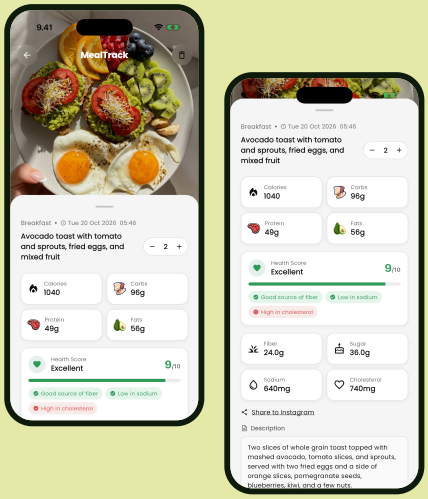
HEALTHY EATING

Does Junk Food Cause Acne? How to Check If Your Meals Are Healthy (2026)

What the research actually says about diet and breakouts, plus a two-week meal audit to find the foods worth swapping.

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QUICK ANSWER

Junk food doesn't cause acne on its own. Hormones, genetics, oil production and clogged pores do most of the work. But diet can make breakouts worse for some people: in small controlled trials, a **low-glycemic diet** reduced acne over 10–12 weeks, and large studies link **sugary drinks and milk** with more acne. The evidence against chocolate and greasy food on its own is weaker. The practical move is to check what you actually eat: log your meals for two weeks, look at each meal's **health score**, swap the low scorers you eat most often, and give your skin about 12 weeks before you judge the result.

In this guide

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Does junk food cause acne?

Acne starts inside a pore. Skin oil (sebum) and dead skin cells block the follicle, bacteria that normally live on the skin multiply in the blocked pore, and the area gets inflamed. The biggest drivers are **hormones** (androgens, which rise sharply in puberty) and **genetics**. That's why plenty of teenagers break out whatever they eat, and plenty of people live on fast food with clear skin.

Diet is more like a volume knob. Foods with a **high glycemic load**, like white bread, fries, sugary cereal and soda, raise blood sugar and insulin quickly. Insulin and a related hormone, IGF-1, can push the skin to make more oil and more of the cells that clog pores. So junk food doesn't create acne from nothing, but for some people it can turn it up.

Which foods are linked to acne

Not all "junk food" is equal here. This is roughly where the research stands:

Food or drink	What studies found	Evidence
High-glycemic foods (white bread, fries, sugary cereal, pastries)	Low-glycemic diets reduced acne in small 10–12 week trials	Moderate
Sugary drinks (soda, sweet tea, energy drinks)	Linked to more acne in large observational studies	Moderate
Milk, especially skim	Linked to more acne; yogurt and cheese show no clear link	Moderate
Whey protein shakes	Breakouts reported in small case series	Limited
Chocolate	Small, mixed studies; hard to separate from the sugar	Weak
Greasy and fried food	Little direct evidence on its own	Weak

Linked doesn't mean caused

Most diet and acne studies are observational: they show which foods go together with acne, not that the food caused it. Everyone reacts differently. The only way to know what matters for **your** skin is to track what you eat and watch for a pattern.

How to check if your meals are actually healthy

Most people can't say what they ate four days ago, let alone whether it was good for them. A two-week meal audit fixes that:

1. **Log everything for two weeks**
   In MealTrack, snap each plate before you eat, scan barcodes for packaged snacks, and log drinks by voice. Count the soda and the sweet coffee: drinks are often the day's biggest source of sugar.

2. **Open each meal's Health Score**
   Every logged meal gets a score from 1 to 10 plus the main reasons behind it, like "Mostly refined carbs" or "Good source of protein". The score rates food quality (cooking method, processing, sugar, fiber and protein), not portion size.

3. **Fix anything the AI misread**
   If a dish is wrong, tap **Fix with AI** and describe it, for example "this is a chicken burrito, not beef". The nutrition and the score are recalculated.

4. **Find your repeat offenders**
   Scroll back through the two weeks. Meals that score 4 or lower more than a couple of times a week are your swap list. For most people it's the same two or three things.

5. **Swap one thing at a time**
   Start with drinks, then the low-scoring meal you eat most often. One change a week is easier to keep than a full diet overhaul.

New to photo logging? The **photo calorie guide** covers the habits that make AI estimates more accurate.

What the Health Score means

Score	What it usually means
9–10	Whole, minimally processed food: lean protein, vegetables, fiber, little added sugar
7–8	Mostly nutritious with one drawback, like white rice, cooking oil or a salty sauce
5–6	Mixed: real nutrition, but noticeably fried, sugary, processed or salty
3–4	Mostly refined carbs, fried food, sugary drinks or processed meat
1–2	Ultra-processed, deep fried, candy or soda, with little nutritional value

A food score, not a skin score

The Health Score rates how nutritious a meal is. It can't predict your breakouts. Use it to spot patterns in what you eat, then let your skin over the next 12 weeks tell you which changes matter for you.



See the score on your next meal

Snap your plate and MealTrack shows calories, macros and a 1–10 Health Score with the reasons behind it. Free on iPhone and Android.

Download on the App Store

Get it on Google Play

Skin-friendly swaps for common junk food

Instead of	Try	Why
Regular soda (330 ml can)	Sparkling water or a zero-sugar soda	Skips about 35 g of sugar

Instead of	Try	Why
Burger or burrito with fries	The same main with a salad or beans on the side	More fiber, slower blood sugar rise
Sugary breakfast cereal	Oats with nuts and berries	Lower glycemic load, more fiber
White bread or rice at every meal	Wholegrain bread, brown rice, or half and half	Digests more slowly
Candy or pastries as a snack	Fruit with a handful of nuts, or yogurt	Less added sugar, more protein
Several glasses of milk a day	Water; keep yogurt and cheese if you like them	Milk has the clearest dairy link

Add before you cut

Rice, noodles and bread raise blood sugar more slowly when you eat them with protein, vegetables or beans. Adding to a meal is often easier than giving up the food you like. If you drink less milk, keep your calcium up with yogurt, cheese or a fortified alternative.

Diet helps, treatment works

Better food is an add-on, not a cure. If your acne is painful, leaves dark marks or scars, or is getting you down, see a doctor or dermatologist. Effective treatments exist, and starting early helps prevent scarring.

- **Give changes about 12 weeks.** That's how long the diet trials ran, and existing spots take weeks to heal either way.
- **Take a selfie once a week** in the same light. Day-to-day skin changes are hard to judge from memory.
- **Don't cut out whole food groups** or eat too little to clear your skin, especially while you're still growing.

Frequently asked questions

Does junk food cause acne?

Not on its own. Acne is driven mainly by hormones, genetics, oil production and clogged pores. But high-glycemic junk food and sugary drinks can make it worse for some people, and in small trials a low-glycemic diet reduced acne over 10–12 weeks.

How long after changing my diet will my skin improve?

Give it about 10–12 weeks. That's how long diet trials ran before they showed a difference, and existing breakouts take weeks to heal regardless of what you eat.

Does greasy food cause acne?

There's little evidence that greasy food on its own causes acne. Fast food usually comes with white buns, fries and soda, which are high-glycemic, so those may matter more than the grease.

Is chocolate bad for acne?

The evidence is mixed. A few small studies found more breakouts after eating chocolate, but most chocolate is also high in sugar, so it's hard to tell which part matters. If you suspect it, track it for a few weeks and watch for a pattern.

How can I tell if a meal is healthy?

Look at what it's made of: whole or processed food, how it's cooked, how much protein and fiber it has, and how much added sugar and salt. In **MealTrack**, every logged meal gets a 1–10 Health Score with the main reasons, so you can see this at a glance.

This guide is general information, not medical advice. Calorie and nutrient figures are typical values and estimates. Talk to a doctor or registered dietitian before making big changes to your diet, especially if you are pregnant, under 18, or managing a medical condition.

MealTrack

CHEAT SHEET

JUNK FOOD & ACNE: THE MEAL AUDIT

Find the foods worth swapping in two weeks

12 weeks
to judge a diet change on your skin

35 g
of sugar in one 330 ml can of cola

1–10
Health Score on every logged meal

1 Log everything, 2 weeks

Meals, snacks and drinks. Photo, barcode or voice.

2 Read the Health Score

9–10 whole food · 5–6 mixed
1–4 fried, sugary, refined

3 Find repeat offenders

Meals scoring 4 or lower more than twice a week.

4 Swap drinks first

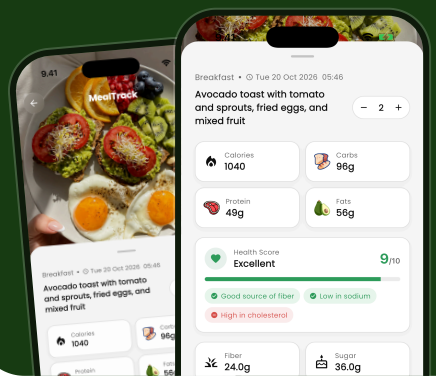
Soda and sweet coffee → water, sparkling or zero-sugar.

5 Lower the glycemic load

Whole grains, beans and veg. Protein with every carb.

6 Judge at 12 weeks

Weekly selfie, same light. Painful or scarring acne? See a doctor.



Check every meal with MealTrack.

MealTrack AI calorie tracker · Free on iPhone & Android

Scan to get the app