



# Living with rosacea

By Sue Sherlock

*When north Vancouver nurse Cathy Grehan started seeing pimples around her nose and chin in her late 40s, she was convinced she had developed adult acne.*

**T**he spots came and went," recalls Cathy. "I was so embarrassed and self-conscious and just wanted them to go away." In fact, this episode turned out to be just one of many in Cathy's decades-long journey with rosacea, a common, chronic inflammatory skin condition that causes redness—and, for some, small red bumps and pimples—to come and go on the face.

### Undiagnosed since her teens

The earliest signs of rosacea—frequent flushing and facial redness—began showing up when Cathy was a teen. "While my friends were putting on blush, I didn't need it. I already had colour in my face," she says.

Through her 20s and 30s, the redness became more persistent and Cathy used makeup to hide any nasty flare-ups, which typically arose

during family holidays or times of stress. Over the years, Cathy's rosacea evolved from frequent flushing and persistent facial redness, usually on her cheeks, nose, chin or forehead, to the frequent appearance of acne-like pimples on her nose and chin

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in her late 40s. This finally pushed Cathy to seek medical help. Her rosacea diagnosis was a surprise.

### Taking its toll

Three million Canadians live with rosacea, and its emotional impact has been well documented. People with rosacea have a five times greater

risk of developing depression than the general population, and some 75 per cent of them report low self-esteem. Studies have also shown that individuals with rosacea have high rates of embarrassment and social anxiety. The feeling of being

stigmatized, branded or shamed by others for having a red face makes this situation worse.

Myths about rosacea add to the problem, as Cathy has found: "People look at you and think, 'Oh, she drinks too much' or that it's a sign of too much stress."

In a survey for the Acne and

Rosacea Society of Canada, seven in 10 Canadians who were shown an image of a person with persistent redness in the central face (the top sign of rosacea) were unable to recognize it as rosacea. Often, people mistake the condition for adult acne.

### Treatments available

To date, there is no cure for rosacea and it's a chronic nag that doesn't seem to go away. However, once Cathy had a diagnosis of rosacea, she was able to take the first steps to getting her condition under control.

As with many patients, a combination of treatments was prescribed.

These included a topical agent (i.e., applied to the skin), oral antibiotics and three laser sessions. While Cathy was pleased with the results—much clearer skin—she knows that rosacea is a chronic condition that comes and goes, and is prepared for an ongoing battle.

"Sometimes it's better and you think, 'Oh wow, look at my face!' Then other times, frustratingly, it comes back again," says Cathy. "I often feel uncomfortable because everyone can see since it is on my face."



### Knowing the risk factors

Cathy is a very typical rosacea patient and ticks all the boxes when it comes to risk factors. She's a woman, and we know that more women are affected than men. She's also between 30 and 50 years old, and of Celtic or northern European origin (Cathy's mother is Russian Ukrainian and her father French Ukrainian). She also has a family history of the condition (her father has rosacea), and she has always had highly sensitive skin.

### Moving ahead

With a busy life raising her two daughters and working as a nurse,

Cathy limits the time she dwells on the ups and downs of rosacea. "I think it's important to move on with your life and do the things you want to do despite living with the condition," she says. "My husband is very supportive and that's great. I aim to stay positive. My rosacea is not going to go away completely, but I've learnt how to cope with it, get it under control when it's bad and not let it interfere. And that's the best I, or any other sufferer, can do."

For more information about rosacea visit [rosaceahelp.ca](http://rosaceahelp.ca), a website of the Acne and Rosacea Society of Canada. The society is a national, not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to raising awareness and educating Canadians about rosacea. 

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## True or False

**There's nothing I can do about my red face and pimples.**

**False:** There are now several effective treatments. You can help, too, by avoiding triggers that make you flush and by practicing good skincare.

**Rosacea is contagious.**

**False:** You can't catch rosacea—it is not a viral condition that can be passed on like a cold or the flu.

## Tips to reduce rosacea flare-ups



### Stay cool in hot indoor spaces

Sip a cold, non-alcoholic drink or chew on ice chips to stay cool. Stay close to an airy entrance and away from fireplaces. Get fresh air as soon as you feel a flush coming on.



### Lessen stress

Create ways to reduce stress. For example, you might be able to problem-solve, delegate or get a good night's sleep before events.



### Minimize your alcohol and spicy food intake

Red wine is the most frequently reported culprit for flushes. Try white wine for a change! Watch out for appetizers, dips and dressings made with chillies and hot, peppery spices or flavourings.