ATTACK OF THE POD PEOPLE ... EEEK!
(DON’T WORRY – THE TITLE IS SCARY, BUT THERE’S A HAPPY ENDING…)

Abstract: This is one woman’s narrative of her experiences with perioral dermatitis (POD). In his film Crimes And Misdemeanors, Woody Allen declares that comedy is tragedy plus time. POD wasn’t a tragedy for me. It did, however, negatively affect me physically and emotionally six months of the year. In reading my attempts to ease the situation, feel free to laugh both with me and at me!

Keywords: perioral dermatitis, self-care, self-diagnosis, illness narrative, stress, grief, doxycycline

It’s Thanksgiving eve and I’m counting my blessings. Near the top of my list is being Perioral Dermatitis-free, no small feat after my second three-month bout within a year. On face value, literally, perioral dermatitis (POD) might not seem to be such a big deal, but when it’s your face being affected for so long, the ramifications are real.

I take this opportunity to share my experiences and missteps in hope of helping others cope with and, ultimately, cure themselves of this mysterious condition. I offer some personal details so you can find some similarities and know that you’re not alone in your path to recovery. Also, perhaps if more patients describe their personal histories, research of this disease can advance faster.

My Stats
☑ female ☑ 47½ years old ☑ under 100lbs ☑ short ☑ daily jog/workout ☑ non-smoker
☑ self-employed ☑ vegetarian ☑ infrequent drinker ☑ caffeine free diet
☑ eastern European ancestry ☑ caucasian ☑ fair skin ☑ bleach upper lip, since childhood
☑ poor circulation (Raynaud’s Syndrome) ☑ sun & light sensitive
☑ on the pill (birth control) ☑ rarely have taken other prescription or OTC drugs
☑ never wore make up ☑ happily married with children dogs

*EARLY & ACCURATE DIAGNOSIS

Get diagnosed by a professional ASAP!!!

*This is the single most important message to act on!

POD, psoriasis, eczema, and other dermatological conditions have many overlapping and often hard to distinguish symptoms that we lay folk don’t know how to diagnose. My husband and I spent hours analyzing images on the Internet and in books. We were wrongly convinced I was suffering from other conditions and tried assorted treatments to cure misdiagnosed ailments. These well-intentioned remedies not only delayed my seeking expert advice, but, actually, exacerbated my POD! The dermatologist I saw recognized the familiar features of POD immediately based on location, pattern, and nuanced markings of my facial eruptions. Just hearing that POD is curable set my mind at ease there and then.

SELF DIAGNOSIS A HUGE MISTAKE

Having been diagnosed 10 years ago with a form of psoriasis affecting my fingernails, I assumed my facial condition was of the same origin. My research for its treatment left me more disheartened – each case...
was unique with no magic pill or cream. Then I read in the *People’s Pharmacy* about atopic eczema. “A-ha”, I thought – *those* are my symptoms. Then for the next month I obediently followed their suggestion to drink Oolong tea. A lot of it (3-4 cups / day). For good measure, I even rubbed some on my blotchy face. Consequently, both my jogging pace and frequency and urgency of urination shot up. I became more irritable from the effects of the strong tea’s caffeine, and then had to wean off of it. Meanwhile, my POD stayed as itchy, flakey, topologically bumpy, and red as ever! The Oolong tea, along with the other home remedies (see Chart at end of piece), proved to be a total **Waste Of A Month Towards Healing!**

**My Snowballing Stress and Ensuing POD Storms - (Bear Through This Part, It Gets Better)**

My first episode of POD was actually 8 or 9 years ago. It wasn’t diagnosed because my face had cleared by the time of my dermatology visit. Naively, I chalked up the symptoms to the cold weather.

**Fast forward to October to December 2011, my next POD breakout.**

Business was flush, but there was a lot of pressure to meet deadlines and other self-employment headaches. Much worse, our 2 senior dogs had GI tract issues. When one of our dogs is sick, anxiety rules the roost. Having both of them sick doubled the fear and stress.

It took 3 months for my face to heal completely. That autumn, each day was unpredictable as to how my face would look and feel. Sometimes I appeared symptom-free for half a day, then *wham*, the second part of the day it was as bad as it gets. Mornings seemed fine for the first 30 minutes, but most often my complexion had steadily deteriorated leaving me with physical and emotional discomfort. My self-image was at an all time low.

Winter and spring saw our dogs’ health worsen. One died in May, the other in July. We had suffered deeply during their downfalls and afterwards while grieving. We had introduced a new pup in June, then another in September. Their arrivals did bring hope and joy, but also a lot of stress. At times, raising pups is like a circus act. Our sleeping pattern was terrible and our emotions were all over the chart.

I broke out with another case of POD one week before our second dog died. I embarked on another 3 month episode which was the most severe I had to endure. I’m convinced that the overwhelming stress acted as a factor in my recurring POD.

This time I photographed the different stages in case the symptoms cleared before my appointment. I needed to know what I had and how to treat it.

**VIEWING DISCRETION ADVISED. RATED ‘D’ FOR DERMATOLOGICALLY IMPAIRED**

**NOTE: I STARTED TAKING DOXYCYCLINE ON OCT 9TH, 2012**

![Images of face at different stages of POD](image-url)
Comedian Jeff Foxworthy is noted for his routine, “You Might Be A Redneck If...”. Based on my own idiosyncrasies (or more accurately, idiot syncrasies?), I’ve come up with a similar thought, “You Might Be A PODneck If...”

If you exhibit these behaviors, you just might be a PODneck.

• You’ve monitored your reaction to the sun’s rays and concluded that the POD is definitely caused by too much sun exposure. Or too little.
• You neglect your dried, cracked, lips blaming protective balms for triggering POD. You determine the pain of your now scabbing mouth is worth it. Besides, it acts as a distraction from the never ending itching of your face. You claim a win-win situation!
• You remember treating a finger wart at age 10 and treat POD likewise. You cut irregular shaped gauze bandages to cover the skin around your mouth and chin, but the sticky adhesive tape around your lips prevents you from forming consonants. On the bright side, you can’t complain about nagging symptoms plus you’ve discovered your potential as a pretty darn good ventriloquist.
• You have a new part-time vocation of ‘mirror patrol’ with a job description requiring hourly observation of perceived subtle POD changes (that are more a result of how the changing daylight is being reflected in the mirror than being real)
• You avoid any cold water from contacting the affected area
• You avoid any hot water from contacting the affected area
• While rinsing your hair or shaving your legs in the shower, you dodge that hot water as a trade off to developing a chronic stiff neck (to be treated with hot water massages that can’t touch your face!)
• You start to rationalize that the inflamed, red, sometimes flakey, sometimes oily bumps invading your lower face has its benefits – like becoming antisocial and avoiding kiss greetings during flu season
• Anything you eat is suspect, especially seasonal crops growing in your organic garden. Hmmm, it’s summer and you’re eating fresh picked grapes, tommies, and zukes – best chow down some fast food known to cause myriad body defects instead
• You’ve mastered the art of NCTF, no-clothes-touch-face, since textile fibers are on your hit list. You consider this maneuver a sign of your youthful agility – as cool as removing your bra without taking off your top. Am I right, or what?!
• And finally, if you’re reading my POD tale, you’re almost sure to be a PODneck...EEEK!

Don’t Despair
You're not alone in all those jumbled feelings and thoughts racing through your head. My own unnecessarily months-long bouts contributed to altering my generally upbeat, energetic demeanor to being uptight, easily irritated and somewhat depressed. Had I known how to treat the disease, I could
have saved my husband, and myself, a lot of time and upset. That’s why I urge you to seek the professional help of a dermatologist!

I’m lucky to have such a tolerant spouse – he did a great job helping me keep things in perspective (prior to us learning that I had POD) by assuring me my condition would eventually improve. He was right. In the interim, he had to bear with my disposition change – on top of dealing with the demise of our dogs and life’s daily obstacles. Those other factors did play a significant role on my overall state of mind, but the recurring POD weighed in heavily on me.

Like most patients, I responded quickly to prescribed doxycycline. I had relief within the first 24 hours and saw steady improvement. By week two on ‘doxy’, I looked and felt so much better, and as my dermatologist predicted, I was POD-free by week 4. So, look forward to having POD cured. Then, you can refocus all that energy into conquering other issues like wrinkles, liver spots, and why do my eye sockets seem to be receding into my head? But I digress. Life is grand. Go to your dermatologist and start your healing.

**GOOD LUCK!**

**PLEASE SCROLL DOWN TO SEE CHART OF THERAPEUTIC ADVENTURES AND MISSTEPS.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance (Food, Chemical…)</th>
<th>Started Using</th>
<th>Stopped Using</th>
<th>Result/Reaction</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doxycycline</td>
<td>Orally for 4 weeks</td>
<td>TO THE RESCUE! Mild nausea in mornings</td>
<td>CURED POD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oolong tea</td>
<td>Drank and applied to face</td>
<td>Jogged faster and peed like there was no tomorrow. Praised myself for rubbing on face -which proved to be in vain. Irritable from caffeine.</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turmeric *A staple in my diet for better circulation</td>
<td>Applied directly to POD area</td>
<td>Topical use turned the area yellowy – orange. My POD looked like I dragged a highlight pen over it. For 3 days, I refused to leave my property. Good call.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbing alcohol</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Helped initially, then became ineffective</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea tree oil</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Bad reaction. Worsened the problem.</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple cider vinegar</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Got more kisses from the pups, but then again, they like my sweat. Eased symptoms for a week, but began only after taking doxycycline. Doc advised I leave POD area alone – I listened.</td>
<td>?,Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrocortisone 1%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Relieved itching only, but not during sleep</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrocortisone 2.5%</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Week #1 - relieved itching, redness and bumps. Week #2 - worsened the symptoms</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt water</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Helped with all symptoms for 5-7 days, then back to the same old same old. Liked the taste of accidental dripping in mouth.</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Sacrificed the benefits of eating it. It was one of about 20 suspected culprits.</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluoride</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Only switched to fluoride-free toothpaste after starting doxycycline- have dentist app’t in 2 weeks – stay tuned…</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial soap</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial moisturizers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Nothing noticeable</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crème bleach</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Paranoid that bleaching my upper lip contributed to the problem, I opted for the dark ‘moustache’ hairs (which really completed my whole facial package!)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>