



Acne is a very common skin condition that causes pimples and other complexion problems. It is most common in teenagers, but also affects adults. Acne usually occurs on the face, but may involve the neck, chest, back and upper arms. Acne typically starts in the teenage years when the oil glands start producing an oily material that moistens the surface of the skin. This material can promote bacterial growth and inflammation that contributes to acne bumps, blackheads and whiteheads. **Certain things can make acne worse:**

- 1) Certain foods can worsen acne for some people (e.g., dairy products and sweets).
- 2) Acne may be worsened by stress and by things you apply to your skin such as moisturizers, cosmetics and certain sunscreens. If cosmetics are used, they should be oil-free. If possible use products labeled "non-comedogenic" which means that it is less likely to cause pimples.
- 3) Some medications including lithium and certain birth control pills can worsen acne.
- 4) In women, acne frequently worsens near the time of menstruation.

#### **Treatments for acne include:**

- 1) Wash your face with a mild soap twice a day without scrubbing.
- 2) Do not pick or squeeze your pimples, as those actions can leave scars.
- 3) There are a number of nonprescription medications that can be used. Benzoyl peroxide containing products work well for many patients. You can apply these products one or two times daily to the affected areas. *Be aware that some people are sensitive to benzoyl peroxide and it can bleach fabric.* Salicylic acid containing soaps can also be beneficial (e.g., Neutrogena acne wash).
- 4) When the acne does not improve well with the nonprescription medications, other medications can be prescribed. For mild to moderate acne I usually start with a topical antibiotic (e.g., Cleocin, Emgel) and (or) a topical retinoid (e.g., Retin A, Differin) that you put on your skin. These agents can irritate the skin, particularly when you first start using them. Irritation is less apt to happen if you allow your skin to dry for 20-30 minutes after washing it before applying these medications. Use it sparingly - A green pea size amount should be enough to cover your face. Only use the medicine where you have acne and avoid applying it to sensitive areas (around the eyes, corners of your mouth and nasal creases. If your skin gets irritated, you should use these products less frequently (e.g., every other day or every third day).
- 5) Oral medications (pills) are frequently prescribed for more severe acne or when topical agents alone don't work well. Doxycycline and minocycline are frequently prescribed for acne but increase the risk of sunburn so sun protective measures should be taken. There are other antibiotic pills that can be taken if doxycycline and minocycline are not tolerated or don't provide good improvement. Beware that antibiotic pills may slightly decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills.
- 6) For pre-menstrual related acne, birth-control pills and (or) spironolactone are good choices.
- 7) For severe or resistant acne isotretinoin (Accutane) can be prescribed. Isotretinoin is taken by mouth. It has many side effects and if taken during pregnancy will cause birth defects. Patients must have special counseling before taking it through the iPLEDGE system. Periodic blood tests and checkups are required while on isotretinoin. Methods to prevent pregnancy are required.
- 8) Acne surgery can be done to remove blackheads, whiteheads, and pimples.
- 9) Swollen tender acne bumps can be injected with a low dose of a corticosteroid to help shrink the bumps down faster and relieve the discomfort.

**Acne medications help control acne but do not cure it. It usually takes two months to determine if a particular treatment is going to work. Acne may worsen for a few weeks when a new medication is started. Several medication changes are often required before the best treatment for a particular patient is found. Acne treatment is usually needed for several years, sometimes longer.**