

# Acne.

## Why Suffer the Hassle?



Acne is a disorder of the sebaceous glands in the skin. The sebaceous glands produce an oil called 'sebum', which is generally secreted into hair follicles before being transported to the surface of the skin. Sebum helps to maintain the skin's moisture and flexibility, and keeps it water proof.

Acne occurs when the duct of the sebaceous gland becomes blocked, forming either pimples (pustules) or deep cysts. It also occurs when hair follicles become blocked with keratin (a protein produced by the skin), leading to the formation of whiteheads and blackheads (also called comedones).

### WHO GETS ACNE?

Acne can occur at any age. It is most common around the time of puberty, when hormones cause the sebaceous glands to grow and produce more sebum, and continues through adolescence. It affects some people more than others; the reason for this is not known.

Acne tends to develop in boys around 13 to 16 years of age, and is often at its worst at 18 - 19 years of age. Girls start puberty earlier, so they tend to develop acne at a younger age, the peak often occurring around 14 years of age.

It is reasonably common for acne to continue into adulthood or develop for the first time in adults.

### WHERE DOES ACNE OCCUR?

Sebaceous glands are found mostly on the forehead, cheeks, chin, neck, chest and back, and it is in these areas that acne most often occurs.

### WHAT ARE THE BEST TREATMENTS?

In many cases, acne can be treated successfully with topical (locally applied) anti-acne gels and lotions. Although it will vary from person to person, acne may clear up by itself.

For moderate to severe acne, stronger medications may be needed, which are usually taken in the form of tablets. Early treatment is important, as it may prevent scarring, especially in cases of severe acne. Discuss this with your doctor or ask to see a dermatologist (skin specialist).

### MILD ACNE

Rubbing a topical anti-acne cream, gel or lotion into the skin is often adequate to reduce inflammation and unblock pores. There are a range of active ingredients used to treat acne and all, except antibiotic, azelaic acid and retinoid containing products, are available at most supermarkets and pharmacies. A doctor's prescription is needed for antibiotic and retinoid creams, gels and lotions and these, with azelaic acid products, can only be purchased at a pharmacy.

**Antibiotic gels and lotions** (containing clindamycin or erythromycin) help get rid of bacteria, which can worsen acne, and reduce skin inflammation and redness. Antibiotic agents should be used with an acne wash to help open the pores. These products may produce a burning sensation, or cause dry, red and itchy skin.



### DEPRESSION

Feeling down and unhappy are common feelings in teenage years. Having acne at this time can make all those feelings seem 'that much worse' and may lead to depression. If you are feeling down because of your acne, or for any other reason, speak to your doctor TODAY.

*This InformBoard has been written by:*

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THE AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE  
OF DERMATOLOGISTS

# Acne. Why Suffer the Hassle?

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## IGNORE MYTHS. LOOK AT THE FACTS.

- Acne is a highly treatable skin condition.
- Acne usually starts in puberty around 13-16 years of age.
- Acne can occur for the first time in adulthood.
- Acne should be treated early, to minimise scarring.
- Junk food, chocolate and other foods do not cause acne.

**Azelaic Acid** reduces skin inflammation and redness, and reduce the number of keratin-producing cells in the skin, lessening the formation of comedones (white and black heads). In some people, these products can cause a burning or stinging sensation, skin redness and irritation, or slight skin pigmentation (colouring).

**Benzoyl Peroxide** reduces skin inflammation and redness, and has a drying effect on the skin. Benzoyl Peroxide can cause a burning sensation, or reddening, peeling or bleaching of the skin.

**Keratolytic agents** (containing sulphur or salicylic acid) work by breaking down and scrubbing away the keratin plugs that block hair follicles and cause comedones. These products have a tendency to dry and irritate the skin.

## ACNE TREATMENTS

### Topical (skin surface) medications

- Antibiotics
- Azelaic acid
- Benzoyl Peroxide
- Keratolytic agents (sulphur and salicylic acid)
- Retinoids (adapalene, isotretinoin, tretinoin)

### Systemic (oral) medications

- Antibiotics
- Contraceptive pill with anti-androgen agent
- Retinoids (isotretinoin)

**Topical Retinoids** (containing adapalene, isotretinoin, or tretinoin) decrease the formation of keratin, resulting in less blocked pores. They also reduce skin inflammation. In some people, retinoids can cause a burning or stinging sensation, blisters, dry and itchy skin, skin sensitivity to light, or skin pigmentation. Importantly, retinoids should never be used if you are pregnant, breast-feeding, or if you are thinking of starting a family (retinoids can cause foetal deformities).

## MODERATE AND SEVERE ACNE

For more severe cases of acne your doctor or dermatologist may prescribe systemic (oral) medications. You and your doctor will work out the best option for you. All these medications require a doctor's prescription.

**Stop using your anti-acne preparation if it is causing a severe stinging or burning sensation, or is causing your skin to blister or peel. Try another product with a lower concentration or different active ingredient.**

**Antibiotics** are used to kill the bacteria important in the causation of acne. These also help to prevent further infection. As with most antibiotics, side effect may include diarrhoea, headache, nausea, vomiting, or a yeast infection (oral & vaginal).

**Hormones.** An oral contraceptive pill containing an anti-androgen agent (cyproterone acetate) may be prescribed for severe or persistent acne in women. These work by reducing the production of sebum. The side effects which can occur with hormone treatment include abdominal cramps, breakthrough bleeding, breast tenderness, dizziness, fluid retention, headache, nausea, skin pigmentation, weight changes, and vomiting.

**Retinoids** (containing isotretinoin) reduce the amount of sebum produced and the size of the sebaceous gland. They also help to reduce skin inflammation and the amount of keratin produced. The side effects which can occur with oral retinoids include blurred vision, conjunctivitis, diarrhoea, dry eyes and lips, dry and scaly skin, dry mouth, fatigue, headaches, itchy skin, muscle and joint ache, nose bleeds, and peeling palms and soles.

Oral retinoids must not be taken if you are pregnant or may become pregnant. Retinoids can cause foetal deformities.

**As with all medications, side effects can sometimes occur. If you suspect you are suffering any side effects from taking medication, see your doctor as soon as possible.**

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The teenage years are a time of great change. It is a time when confidence may be built or lost.

And then there is acne.

For most, a minor embarrassment. For some, a nightmare causing pain and isolation.

It doesn't have to be this way.

If prescribed early enough, treatment may even prevent acne scarring. Now it is possible to seek out treatment that is more than skin deep. Ask your doctor or dermatologist for more information.

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*It's a time of hope & dreams.*

*It isn't a time for the scars that acne can cause.*

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ASK YOUR DOCTOR**