



ACNE TREATMENT AND CONTROL

Almost all teenagers get acne at one time or another. Whether your case is mild or severe, the information here can help you keep your acne under control.

What Causes acne?

You haven't done anything to cause your acne it's not your fault if you have it. Pimples are caused when oil ducts in the skin get plugged up and then burst, causing redness and swelling. Although there are lots of myths about what causes acne, there are three things that seem to be involved.

1. Hormones

When you begin puberty, certain hormones, called androgens, increase in both males and females. These hormones trigger oil ducts on the face, back, and upper chest to begin producing oil. This can cause acne in some people

2. Heredity

If other members of your family had acne as teenagers, there may be a chance that you've inherited a tendency toward getting acne as well.

3. Plugged Oil Ducts

If you are prone to acne, the cells that line the oil ducts in your skin tend to get larger and produce more oil, and the ducts get plugged. This traps the oil and forms whiteheads. The plugged ducts allow germs in the skin to multiply and produce chemicals that cause redness and swelling. This is why simple blackheads and whiteheads may turn red and bumpy and turn into the pimples of acne. There's not much you can do about hormones or heredity, so your best control efforts are those that keep the oil ducts unplugged.

What makes acne worse?

- Pinching (or "popping") pimples, which forces oil from the oil ducts into the surrounding normal skin, causing redness and swelling
- Harsh scrubbing, which irritates the skin

- Things that rub on the skin, such as headbands, hats, hair, and chin straps, which also cause irritation
- Certain cosmetics, such as makeup, creams, and oily hair products, which can block oil ducts and aggravate acne
- Some medications, including hormones such as birth control pills
- In girls, “periods” (menstruation), because hormone levels change before periods during the menstrual cycle
- Emotional stress and nervous tension
- Avoid using harsh soaps/scrubs on your face. Use gentle cleansers (e.g. Cetaphil, Neutrogena, Dove)

What doesn’t cause acne?

- Acne is not caused by foods you eat. Despite what you may have heard, there is no proof that soft drinks, chocolate, and greasy foods cause acne.
- It’s not caused by dirt. The black plug in a blackhead is pigment. It’s not dirt. No matter how carefully you wash your face, you can still have acne.
- It’s not something you can “catch” or “give” to another person.
- It’s not caused by sexual thoughts or masturbation.

Treating acne

It’s important to know that there is no true cure for acne. If untreated, it can last for many years, though acne usually clears up as you get older. The following treatments, however, generally can keep acne under control.

1. First Choice for OTC meds is Differin 0.1%gel- use as directed. May add benzoyl peroxide as well to maximize effect if tolerating without too much irritation or dryness.

2. Use topical benzoyl peroxide lotion or gel in 2.5%, 5%, or 10% strengths.

- Benzoyl peroxide helps kill skin bacteria, unplug the oil ducts, and heal acne pimples. Many brands are available. Read the labels or ask your pediatrician or pharmacist about it.
- Start slowly with a 2.5% or 5% lotion or gel once a day. After 2 weeks, increase use to twice a day (morning and night) if your skin isn’t too red or isn’t peeling.
- Apply a thin film to the entire area where pimples may occur. Don’t just dab it on current blemishes. Avoid the delicate skin around the eyes, mouth, and corner of the nose.
- If your acne isn’t better after 4-6 weeks, you may increase to a 10% strength lotion or gel. Start with one application each day for at least 2 weeks, increase to twice a day applications if your skin tolerates it.

3. If you don't see results, make an appointment to see one of us in the office.

If no improvement with consistent use of acne medication for 2 months, call our office to discuss an appointment for acne management. Your doctor can prescribe stronger treatments, if needed, and will teach you how to use them properly. Three kinds of medications may be recommended:

- **Topical Retinoids (Retin-A, Differin OTC)** helps unplug oil ducts but must be used exactly as directed. Be aware that exposure to the sun (or tanning parlors) can cause increased redness in some people who are using the medication.
- **Topical antibiotic solutions** may be used in addition to other medications for a type of acne, called pustular acne.
- **Oral antibiotic solutions** may be used in addition to creams, lotions, or gels if your acne doesn't respond to topical treatments alone. If you use oral birth control pills, be sure to ask your doctor whether this type of acne treatment will reduce their effectiveness or if these particular birth control pills may be making your acne worse.

3. What about the "miracle drug" Accutane?

Isotretinoin (Accutane) is a very strong chemical taken in pill form. It is used only for severe cystic acne that hasn't responded to any other treatment. It has potentially serious side effects and must never be taken before or during pregnancy. Patients who take Accutane must be carefully supervised by a dermatologist knowledgeable about its usage.

Important things to remember

Be patient. It takes 4-6 weeks to see any improvement: so you must give each treatment enough time. Most acne medicines improve acne by 50-70%. They rarely make acne go away completely. Have realistic expectations.

Be faithful. Follow your program every day. Don't stop and start each time your skin may appear to worsen early in the program before you begin to see improvement. For acne medications to work, you need to use them every day.

Follow directions. Not using your treatment as directed is the most common reason the treatment fails.

Don't use other people's medication. This holds true for all medications, especially Accutane. Doctors prescribe medication especially for a particular patient. What's good for a friend may be very harmful for you. Never take Accutane that's prescribed for another person.

Don't overdo. More is not better. Too much scrubbing makes skin worse. Too much benzoyl peroxide or Retin-A cream makes your face red and scaly. Too much oral antibiotic may cause side effects.

All acne medications make your skin more sensitive to sunburn; make sure to use sun protection/sunscreens. For sunscreen look for SPF 30 or higher, UVA and UVB "Broad Spectrum" coverage and that the product listed as "non-comedogenic" or non-acne causing on the label.

Finally, many people don't understand acne and may say hurtful things about it. Although acne bothers you, it's only temporary. With present-day treatment it can usually be controlled.