

Isotretinoin

General Information:

- Isotretinoin is a medication we use for severe acne or acne that has been resistant to other treatments.
- The great benefit from isotretinoin is that it works great for acne and it is the only treatment we have that has the potential to cure your acne. The majority of people who take isotretinoin will not require further treatment for their acne.
- However, isotretinoin is a serious medication that has many potential side effects, and it must be monitored closely.
- You will be required to come monthly for clinic visits and blood work. Please do not eat for six hours before your visits so that your blood work can be drawn while you are fasting.
- You will be given a handbook with a form you must sign prior to starting isotretinoin therapy. We will review side effects with you in clinic, but you are expected to read this handbook completely.
- PLEASE ask us if you have any questions regarding your treatment with isotretinoin or if you have questions regarding other treatment options for your acne.
- If you are experiencing any new symptoms while on isotretinoin therapy, please notify our office so we can discuss these with you (205-682-8022).
- You CANNOT donate blood while taking this medication. We do not want a pregnant female to get your blood!
- This medication will make you more sensitive to the sun. So make sure to wear your sunscreen and practice other sun protective measures.
- You should stop all of your other acne therapy when you start isotretinoin. This includes topical and oral medications.
- If you are tolerating the medication well and are on a standard dosing schedule, most people will require around 6 months of treatment with this drug.
- There are several different brands of Isotretinoin available. You may receive Amnesteem, Sotret, Claravis, Myorisan, or Zenatane from the pharmacy. These MUST be taken with fatty food or the medication will not work. Absorica is the only brand that can be taken with or without food.
- Do not take vitamin A supplements while taking this medication (including a multivitamin containing vitamin A).
- Do not drink alcohol while taking this medication.

Female Patients:

- Females who become pregnant while taking isotretinoin have a much higher chance of having a baby with birth defects. So, females who take this medication CANNOT get pregnant. For this reason, females are required by law to use 2 forms of birth control while taking this medication and for 1 month after the medication is completed.
- Isotretinoin will not affect future pregnancies.

Potential Side Effects:

- Isotretinoin will make your eyes, lips, nose and skin dry. We encourage you to start early with moisturizers.
 - o For your lips, we like Aquaphor ointment, Vaniply ointment, Cerave healing ointment, or Vaseline petroleum jelly. Apply these all day long! A basic lip balm or chapstick is OK, but the greasy stuff works the best. If your lips get really dry or cracked, Dr. Dan's Cortibalm can be very helpful.
 - o If you get nose bleeds, use saline nasal spray to 'wet' the nasal mucosa. You can also apply Vaseline petroleum jelly with a q-tip. A humidifier in your room may also be helpful.
 - o Use lots of moisturizers on your skin. Cetaphil Restoraderm wash and lotion or Cerave lotion/cream and Cerave hydrating cleanser are great choices.
 - o People who wear contacts will often require lubricating drops for their eyes. Use these frequently if needed.
- Most people will have some elevation of the fats in their blood (cholesterol levels and especially triglycerides), but usually these do not rise to significant levels. This is monitored closely at your monthly visits. It is recommended that you try to eat a healthy diet low in fatty and fried foods while on this medication.
- Isotretinoin has been linked to suicide and depression, especially in the media. This association is still uncertain and recent large studies have not shown a definitive link between isotretinoin and suicide risk. That being said, we take this potential side effect very seriously. Please tell your doctor or physician assistant if you have a personal history or strong family history of depression. Please tell your loved ones to notify our office if they notice any change in your mood while you are on this medication.
- Isotretinoin has also been questioned for its association with inflammatory bowel disease such as Crohn's or Ulcerative Colitis. Isotretinoin can flare these conditions in someone with a known history of inflammatory bowel disease. However, it is not known if isotretinoin potentially 'unmasks' the disease in someone who was going to get it anyway or whether it could potentially cause bowel disease. Recent large studies do NOT show a risk of this medication causing inflammatory bowel disease. If you have a personal or family history of inflammatory bowel disease, diarrhea or bloody diarrhea, please notify your doctor or physician assistant. If you develop severe abdominal pain, diarrhea, or rectal bleeding while on this medication, stop the drug and call our office.
- Rarely, isotretinoin can affect your liver or blood counts (WBC or RBC). These will be monitored closely with blood tests at your monthly visits.
- Some people will get headaches while taking this medication and this can rarely be associated with a serious condition. If you are experiencing bad headaches, not controlled with pain medications such as ibuprofen or Tylenol, please notify your doctor or physician assistant.
- Some people will notice joint or muscle pain. If this is not controlled with over the counter pain medications such as ibuprofen or Tylenol, please notify our office.

- Rarely, isotretinoin can affect your bones. If you are having skeletal symptoms, please notify our office.
 - Some patients notice difficulty with night vision while taking this medication. This is expected to return to normal after the medication is discontinued.
 - Rarely, you may notice some hair loss while taking this medication. Please notify our office if this occurs.
 - Occassionally, you may have a significant worsening of your acne at the start of treatment, usually the first 2-3 weeks. If you notice significant worsening of your acne, or you develop a red or swollen face, please call our office so this can be treated.
- You should not have any waxing or cosmetic procedures done while on this medication.