

Acne: A Complete Patient Guide

Understanding Acne:

Acne is the most common skin condition in the US, affecting up to 80-90% of people aged 12 to 24. Up to 50% of women in their 20s, 30% of women in their 30s, and 25% of women in their 40s. Developing an acne bump is multifactorial, meaning that several processes lead to its formation.

Acne begins with the "plugging" of the hair follicle due to increased stickiness of the skin cells, causing a buildup of oil and other debris. The presence of *C.acnes* bacteria and excessive oil production, often influenced by hormones, also contributes to acne formation.

Given these factors, several medications are often required to treat the different aspects of acne.

General Information:

- **Do not pick** your acne bumps, as this will increase the risk of scarring. A blackhead is oxidized oil, not dirt.
- **Sunlight** often temporarily improves acne, but this is not a lasting effect, and we know that exposure to sunlight increases your risk of skin cancer. Several of your acne medications may also increase your sensitivity to the sun. **NEVER** use tanning beds to improve your acne.
- **Some birth control pills** can be helpful for acne. If this is something you are interested in, you can discuss this with your health care provider.
- **Oral antibiotics** may be required for more severe acne. The intent is to decrease inflammation, not to treat an infection. Unless otherwise directed, these should be continued until your next appointment.
- For very severe acne, **isotretinoin** (*formerly Accutane*) may be prescribed. This is a serious medication with many potential side effects and must be monitored closely. It is the most effective acne treatment available.

- **Pregnancy & Breastfeeding:** Many acne treatments cannot be used during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Please let your health care provider know if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Should you become pregnant, stop all medications immediately and schedule an appointment to discuss treatment options.

Diet & Acne:

More recent evidence suggests that diets may have a role in worsening acne. A diet high in carbohydrates with a high glycemic index (*such as white bread, potatoes, sugary drinks*) may worsen acne. Conversely, a diet with lots of protein and carbohydrates with a low glycemic index (*whole wheat breads and pastas, oatmeal, brown rice*) may improve it.

While some studies have linked dairy and chocolate to acne, the evidence is not strong. If you believe a specific food adversely affects your acne, it is reasonable to stop eating that food.

Skin Care:

You should wash your face twice a day with a mild soap or soapless cleanser. If we suggest a gentle cleanser, select a wash that is not marketed for acne. Acne is not caused by dirt on your skin. More frequent washing is not necessary and can actually cause irritation.

Almost everyone should use a **non-comedogenic** (*does not clog pores*) or "Oil-Free" moisturizer. We recommend a moisturizer with sunscreen in the morning and a moisturizer at night.

Topical Treatments:

- **Benzoyl Peroxide** cleansers are available over the counter and will bleach fabrics, so be careful with towels and washcloths.
- **Salicylic Acid** cleanser
- **Topical antibiotic** (usually Clindamycin)

- **Combination** benzoyl peroxide and retinoid (*Epiduo or Epiduo Forte*). Combination topicals that include 2-3 of these active ingredients (if benzoyl peroxide is included), will bleach fabrics, so make sure it is completely dry before putting on a shirt. If you use it at night, consider using an old pillowcase.
- **Topical retinoid** (e.g., *Differin, Retin-A, Tazorac, Tretinoin & others*)
- **Topical Dapsone** (*Aczone gel*)
- Topical Clascoterone (*Winlevi*)

PIPA & Scarring:

Post Inflammatory Pigment Alteration is the red or brown discoloration that can occur after an acne bump has been resolved. This can last for months but will eventually resolve with time, sun protection and controlling the acne. Your health care provider can help you find ways to speed up this process.

Acne scarring or indentions in the skin from old acne is permanent and difficult to treat. Our top priority is to avoid scarring. If you already have acne scarring, you and your health care provider can discuss options such as microneedling and chemical peels.

Makeup:

It is okay to wear makeup. All makeup should be **non-comedogenic** (*non-acnegenic*). It should be applied to clean, moisturized skin. Mineral makeup lines are non-irritating, provide sun protection, and work well to cover acne.