

ACNE

Almost all teenagers will develop acne, some more than others. Acne is related to three factors –

- Hormones stimulate skin glands to produce more sebum, an oily substance intended to groom hairs.
- Dead skin cells form plugs in the pores where sebum is supposed to escape.
- Bacteria break down the sebum into more irritating by-products (free fatty acids).

When a pore is filled with sebum it can be seen as a whitehead or a blackhead. (Blackheads are in fact not dirt – they are just sebum mixed with normal skin pigment. Thus washing or scrubbing will not get rid of blackheads.) When the skin gland keeps producing sebum but the plug prevents its release, the sebum can break through the wall of the hair follicle and rupture into the tissue beneath the skin. This causes a red swollen, tender pimple.

Several things make acne worse. These include:

- Using oil-based skin products (increased plugs)
- Vigorously scrubbing or squeezing skin (increased follicle rupture)
- Sunburn (increased plugs)
- Some bromide-containing preservatives (irritants that increase plugs). These are found in fast foods and chocolate, for example. Foods rarely make acne worse, though. If you notice a food makes your acne worse, avoid it.
- Harsh soaps and astringents (increased plugs)
- Fluctuations in hormones, as in girls' menstrual cycles

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR ACNE

- Avoid irritants. Wash gently with mild soap no more than two or three times a day (Dove, Neutrogena, Cetaphil).
- Do not scrub or squeeze skin.
- Use oil-free products.
- Use sunscreen.
- Use products to keep the dead skin layer thin so plugs do not form in the pores. Such products include:

Benzoyl Peroxide (no prescription necessary)

Causes a fine peeling to keep the skin thin. At first benzoyl peroxide can make skin look red or irritated. To minimize this, use it every other night at first and start with the

weakest form. (It comes in 5% and 10% strengths and in cream or gel – gel is more drying.) Then the strength and/or frequency can be increased. Test an area of your forearm first to be sure you won't have an allergic reaction. Then apply a thin film all over the areas that break out – face, shoulders, and back) The best times to put benzoyl peroxide on your skin are 20 minutes after washing and at bedtime. Leave it on all night. You should use sunscreen when you are using benzoyl peroxide. It takes 4 – 6 weeks to see improvement with benzoyl peroxide. Benzoyl peroxide may bleach fabrics.

Retin A (tretinoin) or Differin (adapalene) or Tazorac (tazarotene) (prescription)

These also cause fine peeling of the skin, and just like benzoyl peroxide, can make skin look irritated. Therefore, you should start with the mildest form and work your way up. They must also be used everywhere you get pimples, the same way as benzoyl peroxide. Forming pimples may come to the surface, so at first acne may seem to get worse. Remember to use sunscreen. It takes 4 – 6 weeks to see improvement with Retin A, Differin or Tazorac.

Combining benzoyl peroxide and one of these can sometimes be beneficial. Epiduo is an example of a cream with both.

Antibiotics (prescription)

Usually reserved for more severe acne. Both oral (pill by mouth) and topical (cream or gel for the surface of the skin) forms can help. Antibiotics take four to six weeks to start working. There are products by prescription that contain both benzoyl peroxide and topical antibiotic, such as benzaclin or benzamycin.

Accutane (prescription)

A very powerful drug, accutane can cause birth defects when used during pregnancy, and is used only in the most severe cases of acne.

Treating acne requires patience and persistence. There is no “quick cure” for acne but with daily skin care it can be controlled. The treatments described here are all aimed at preventing future acne. Keep in mind some medicines may initially make your skin look a little redder. Some people continue to get acne into their 20's and 30's and need to keep using good skin care routines for many years. We are happy to work with you until your acne is under control and you are satisfied with your skin.