

## 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)
- Foods rarely make acne worse, though; if you notice a food makes your acne worse, avoid it. Foods high in iodine may promote acne. There isn't enough iodine in seafood or iodized salt to cause skin problems, but acne has been linked to the high iodine levels in kelp, a seaweed extract sometimes used in sports drinks
- 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 (water-based and non-perfumed)
- Use sunscreen.

**Common medications used to treat acne include:**

### **Benzoyl Peroxide** (no prescription necessary)

Benzoyl Peroxide kills bacteria that cause acne and removes excess oil and dead skin cells which can clog pores and cause acne. At first benzoyl peroxide can make skin look red or irritated. To minimize this, use it every other day at first and start with the weakest form. It is available in strengths ranging from 2.5% to 10% and in forms such as washes, cream and gels. Gels tend to be the most drying. Over time, 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.

### **Salicylic Acid**

Salicylic acid helps unclog pores. It is available in many over the counter acne products. It can cause stinging and mild skin irritation.

### **Retinoids - Retin A (tretinoin) or Differin (adapalene)** (prescription and non-prescription)

These medicines unplug oil ducts, and just like benzoyl peroxide, can make skin look irritated. They should be applied in the evening. As with benzoyl peroxide, starting with every other day use can lessen irritation. Waiting 20 minutes after washing your face before applying a retinoid can reduce irritation. They must also be applied everywhere you get pimples. Retinoids can make acne worse at first, so don't despair, it will eventually help. Remember to use sunscreen daily. It takes 4 – 6 weeks to see improvement.

### **Antibiotics** (prescription)

Antibiotics kill bacteria that promote 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. Oral antibiotics are typically used for more severe acne.

### **Accutane** (isotretinoin)

A very powerful drug, Accutane can cause worrisome side-effects and birth defects when used during pregnancy, and is used only in the most severe cases of acne. This medication can only be prescribed by a dermatologist. People on isotretinoin are monitored closely with lab tests.

Treating acne requires patience and persistence. Using your medication every day is important. 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. 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.