

# Saints Dermatology

## ACNE

### WHAT IS ACNE?

Acne results from a malfunction of special oil glands (sebaceous glands) that are attached to the pores in acne-prone skin on the face, upper back, and chest. This malfunction is related primarily to hormone effects on the oil glands and conditions that plug up skin pores. Teenagers of both sexes and adult women are most prone to acne problems.

### THE TYPES OF ACNE SKIN LESIONS:

1. Open comedone (blackhead): The pressure of the sebum (oil) and dead skin cells forces the plug to the surface of a pore in the skin. The color of the blackhead is caused by skin pigment and dead skin cells, not dirt. Blackheads cannot be washed or scrubbed away.
2. Closed comedone (whitehead): Occurs when the plug in the pore remains below the skin surface.
3. Papule (pimple) and Pustules (pus bumps): The pressure from the sebum and dead cells becomes great, the trapped material may seep through the walls of the skin pore and cause redness and discomfort. This forms the pimple or pus bump.
4. Cyst: A deep, uncomfortable swelling in the skin associated with acne.
5. Scarring: May occur after acne papules, pustules, and cysts have been present for a while. Once scarring occurs, the changes are permanent. However, a dermatologist may perform certain procedures to improve the appearance of the scarring.

### THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE OR MAKE ACNE WORSE

1. Oil-based cosmetics, especially foundations
2. Use of products on the skin that clog pores – All products used on the face should be labeled as “noncomedogenic” – This means the product has been shown not to plug up pores.
3. Working in oily conditions (flipping hamburgers, working with industrial oils).
4. Picking or squeezing acne bumps
5. Pregnancy and other hormonal changes in some women
6. Certain medications: lithium, cortisone (prednisone), seizure medications (Dilantin), oral/patch contraceptives in some women, vitamin B6 & B12
7. Stress and emotional tension can trigger an outbreak of acne on occasion.

### THINGS THAT DO NOT CAUSE OR MAKE ACNE WORSE

Chocolates, nuts, milk products (rare reports associating dairy with acne), other foods

### TYPES OF ACNE TREATMENT

There are a number of different ways to treat acne depending on the severity and the type of acne:

#### Topical (directly applied to the skin)

1. Retinoids (tretinoin, Retin-A, Differin, Tazorac): Medications that loosen the plugs in clogged pores. They are most helpful for blackheads and whiteheads.
2. Benzoyl peroxide: A peeling agent that dries the skin and helps prevent the growth of bacteria.
3. Antibiotics are useful to destroy skin bacteria. Some occur in combination with benzoyl peroxide (Duac, Benzaclin, Benzamycin).

#### Taken by mouth

1. Antibiotics (tetracycline, erythromycin, minocycline [Minocin], doxycycline [Doryx, Adoxa]): These are effective in decreasing inflammation by decreasing bacteria counts. Oral antibiotics are most effective for acne with many papules, pustules and cysts.
2. Isotretinoin (Accutane, Amnesteem): This is a very strong medicine associated with severe side effects. It should be used only for the treatment of severe acne.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR DOCTOR'S ACNE TREATMENTS WORK BETTER?

1. Stop using all of the over-the-counter treatments you might have been using upon starting to use your prescription acne medications.
2. Gently wash your face no more than twice a day with a mild soap or acne cleanser using your hands and fingers only. Do not scrub your face with a wash cloth or Buff Puff. Recommended soaps include: Ivory, Purpose Gentle Cleansing bar. Recommended acne cleansers include: Prescription: Brevoxyl (4% benzoyl peroxide) Creamy Wash, Non-prescription: PanOxyl (5% or 10% benzoyl peroxide wash), Neutrogena Oil-Free Acne Wash, Cetaphil Oil-Free Daily Face Wash, or any other oil-free

acne cleanser, wash, cloth, or pad used gently. After exercising, remove sweat, dirt, and oil with a salicylic acid cleansing pad (Stridex pad, Neutrogena pads etc) as these are easy to keep in your gym or sports bag.

3. After washing your face, pat it dry and then use your prescription medications as directed. Retin-A and related products (Retin-A Micro, Tazorac Differin,) are best used in the evening 15 to 20 minutes after washing your face and patting it dry. A pea-sized drop of Retin-A should cover the face. Using too much Retin-A will not “make it work faster” but only cause irritation.
4. Minimize sun exposure. Sunlight and tanning beds may offer some temporary relief. However, sunlight can aggravate the drying and irritating effects of your doctor's acne treatments and certainly increase the risk of skin cancer.
5. If your face becomes irritated, burns, or itches after starting your acne medications, start using a “noncomedogenic” facial moisturizer that contains a sunscreen in the morning. Recommendations include: Neutrogena Healthy Defense Daily Moisturizer, Cetaphil Daily Facial Moisturizer with SPF 15. At night you can use CeraVe lotion (available at CVS and Walgreens). In addition, you can try using your acne facial medications every other day instead of every day. Your face will usually get used to the initial irritating effects of your acne medications after a few weeks and you should then be able to start using them on a daily basis again.
6. Do not pick or squeeze acne bumps. Use a green cosmetic makeup concealer from the drugstore to cover them up (green makeup temporarily erases red colors in the skin). Recommendations include: Physicians Formula Gentle Cover Concealer Stick, Physicians Formula Concealer 101 Perfecting Concealer Duo.
7. If you use makeup, make sure that you are using only water-based makeup that is “noncomedogenic”. Avoid using oil-based makeups - they can plug up your pores of make your acne worse.
8. Your tetracycline class antibiotic medicines (minocycline, tetracycline) should be taken by mouth on an empty stomach if possible - they work better that way. This is less important for doxycycline. Avoid eating two hours after or 1 hour before taking your minocycline or tetracycline medication. Antacids or dairy products can block the absorption of these medications into your system making them not work as well. If you must, a small amount of bread or crackers can be taken to offset an upset stomach.
9. Be patient and use you acne medicines every day (even when clear). All acne treatments work slowly, typically taking six weeks to start seeing good results. If you don't use your medicines, they will not work.

## **SIDE EFFECTS THAT YOUR ACNE TREATMENTS CAN CAUSE**

### Treatments taken by mouth:

Minocycline (Minocin) - headache, dark patches on skin, lupus-like symptoms (rare)

Doxycycline (Doryx, Adoxa) - sun sensitivity and a burning sensation in the esophagus if the medicine is not taken with a full glass of water. Also do not lay down immediately after taking doxycycline.

Tetracycline (Acromycin V, Sumycin) - nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

Isotretinoin (Accutane, Amnesteem) –Dryness of skin, lips and eyes, easy blistering of skin with running, muscle or joint aches, possible mood changes, severe birth defects.

### Treatments applied directly to the skin

Dryness, redness, peeling

If you have any questions about any of these, check with your doctor's office.

## **ACNE AND PREGNANCY**

There is a high risk of very severe birth defects if a woman becomes pregnant while taking isotretinoin (Accutane, Amnesteem). Patients and doctors should do everything possible to prevent this from happening. If you become pregnant or think you might have become pregnant, stop using all of your acne medicines until speaking with your doctors. **This is especially true for oral medications such as isotretinoin and antibiotics (except erythromycin).** Check with your doctor before restarting your acne medicines that are taken by mouth if you are nursing your baby. In addition, tetracycline, doxycycline, and minocycline have not been proven to interfere with the effectiveness of oral contraceptive pills and patches.