

## Acne: Guidelines for Teenagers

Almost all teenagers get acne at one time or another. Pimples are caused by oil glands getting plugged and bursting, leading to redness and swelling. Changing hormone levels during puberty make the situation worse. Acne is worse in some families.

### What makes acne worse?

- Pinching pimples or scrubbing skin
- Things that rub on the skin (headbands, hats, helmet chinstraps, etc.)
- Certain cosmetics, creams, oily hair products
- Some medications, including certain birth control pills
- Hormones in puberty; in girls, increased hormones just before menstrual periods
- Emotional stress and nervous tension
- There is no proof that certain foods make acne worse

### Treating acne:

- Cleansing face: keep clean but do not scrub. Use a mild cleanser such as Cetaphil or an acne cleanser such as Aveeno acne bar, Neutrogena Acne Wash, or Benzoyl Peroxide 5% bar
- Cosmetics, lotions and sunscreens should be oil-free only. Examples include:
  - Complex 15 lotion for dryness
  - Neutrogena or Coppertone Oil-free sunscreen
  - Beware of hair products and gels
- Avoid over-the-counter products including expensive cosmetic products because they often have irritating additives or just are a waste of money.

### Medications:

- Medications:
  - **Benzoyl peroxide:**  
Kills the bacteria that worsen acne, unplugs oil ducts, and helps heal acne pimples  
Start slowly with 5% gel or lotion once a day. After one week, increase use to twice a day if not using another medication. If your acne is not better after 4 to 6 weeks, try the 10% strength. Benzoyl peroxide is now available over-the-counter. Be sure to get the pure form; you may want to ask the pharmacist for the type that used to be prescription only.
  - **Retin-A:**  
Opens up blocked glands; prevents new pimples  
Can make your skin very red and dry and cause peeling. Newer medicines do this less; let your doctor know if you need to switch. Use at night only to avoid causing your skin to be more sensitive to the sun.  
Can take 2-3 months to see an improvement in your skin.  
Be patient and stick to your program. It takes 3-6 weeks to see an improvement.

- **Antibiotics:**  
Antibiotic gels can be very helpful for acne that is swollen and red or acne that is not improving with other medication. Sometimes a few months or more of oral antibiotics are needed to get the acne under control
- **Accutane:**  
This is a very powerful pill available for people with severe scarring acne that cannot be controlled by other medication. Only dermatologists can prescribe this medication which must be taken daily for 4 to 5 months. It causes severe birth defects and must be used with extreme caution. It often cures acne after one or two courses by preventing blockage of the oil ducts.

**Remember:** Be patient. It can take 4 to 5 weeks to see an improvement. Follow your treatment plan every day. Don't stop and start each time your skin changes. Sometimes your skin may appear to worsen early in the program before it gets better.