

# Family Education Sheet

## Acne (Department of Dermatology)



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### What is acne?

- Acne is a disorder that causes your skin to break out in pimples (also called "zits") and other kinds of bumps. Acne is most often on the face, but can be found on other parts of the body.
- Acne can begin at age 8 or 9 and usually gets better by the mid-20s.
- Acne cannot be cured. Doctors can control it with different kinds of medicine.
- There are several options for medicines. Your doctor will choose the best one for you, based on the kind of acne you have.

### What does mild acne look like?

- With mild acne, you can see small bumps on your skin, called "blackheads," and small pimples, called "whiteheads." These are caused by dead skin cells and oil in the pores and hair follicles.
- Blackheads and whiteheads are not caused by dirt. That's why rubbing and heavy washing of the skin does not help the acne to go away. In fact, rubbing the skin or using harsh or rough soap can make your skin more irritated.
- Mild acne does not leave scars.

### What does moderate to severe acne look like?

- With moderate to severe acne, you see larger pimples on the skin. These have pus (a gluey white liquid) inside that you can see. There may also be bumps that are about the same size as the pimples, but without pus inside. These are signs of a kind of acne that goes deeper into the skin.
- These pimples and bumps are caused by oil glands. There are cells in the skin that release oil. When these cells become clogged with dead skin, they can break. This sends oil into the skin, causing irritation.
- If it's treated early and you follow your treatment plan, you can keep the acne from scarring your skin.
- Severe acne is more likely if your skin is very oily. This can be caused by your body changing during puberty (growing physically from a child to an adult).

### What can make my acne worse?

- **Repeatedly pushing, touching or scrubbing areas where you have acne.** This can happen if you wear headbands or helmets a lot.
- **Oil and grease in moisturizers and/or makeup.** Try to use these as little as possible.
- **Oils in hair.** Try to pull your hair back from your face as much as possible.
- **Being around greased-filled air** in restaurant kitchens.
- **Squeezing pimples and scratching the skin** with fingernails. This can lead to scarring.
- **Emotional stress** can make acne flare up, since this causes changes in your hormone levels.
- **Some medicines taken for other problems can cause acne or breakouts that look like acne.**
  - Some of these medicines are lithium, steroids and bromides or iodides, which are in some sedatives and cough medicines.
  - Make sure you tell your doctor about all the medicines you are taking.

### Does it matter what I eat?

- There is no specific diet that will make your acne go away.
- Some foods can make acne worse.

### What can I expect from treatment?

- It may take 2 to 3 months to see an improvement in your acne.
- If your doctor prescribes oral antibiotics (medicine that you swallow), you may have appointments every 3 to 4 months.
- If your doctor only prescribes topical therapy (medicine that you put directly on your face), your visits may be 1 to 2 times a year.
- Whatever treatment your doctor decides is best for you, you may need to continue it in some way for several years.

## How should I treat my acne?

- **Wash your face** and/or the areas where you have acne.
- **Use water with gentle, alcohol-free soap or over-the-counter acne wash.**
- **Do not use moisturizers and cosmetics if you do not need to.** If you do use them, choose products that are labeled oil-free and non-comedogenic (will not block your pores).
- **Be patient.** Do not stop using the medications your doctor gave you if you do not see results right away. It can take up to 3 months for your skin to start getting better.

## Treatment plan for mild acne

### Topical antibiotic, benzoyl peroxide or retinoid:

- Start using your medicine 2–3 times a week.
  - Add a day or 2 every week, for a month, until you are using the medicine once a day.
  - Use a small amount (the size of a pea) for your entire face. Your face must be dry before you put on the medicine. Try to keep it out of the creases in your skin. Your skin will probably get dry and may turn a little red. If it starts to peel, use your medicine less often each week.

## Treatment plan for moderate to severe acne

- **Do not take oral (swallowed) antibiotics if you are pregnant.** Also, all antibiotics can lower the strength of birth control pills. This means that while you are taking them you should use a different kind of birth control, if it is relevant.
- **Stop using your acne medicine right away and call your doctor if you have a rash, hives, intense stomach pains, diarrhea or severe dizziness or headaches.**
- All antibiotics can make you a little nauseous (feeling sick), throw up and cause vaginal yeast infections (discharge and itching).
- Do not take antibiotics close to bedtime.
- You can become allergic to antibiotics.

### Tetracycline

- Take it with an 8 oz. cup of water. Do not take it with milk or dairy products. Do not take it with iron pills or any vitamins with iron.

### Doxycycline/Minocycline

- This medicine may make you more likely to get a sunburn. It may also cause headaches, dizziness or dark spots on your skin.

### Erythromycin

- This medicine can cause stomach discomfort and/or diarrhea. Take this medicine with food.

### Bactrim

- This medicine may cause a severe rash with blisters.