

PATIENT HANDOUT: Please feel free to copy this page.

ACNE

What causes acne?

Acne is a skin disease that is very common in both teenagers and adults. When oil production of tiny glands (found mostly on the face and scalp) increases due to hormonal changes, the glands can become plugged, inflamed, or infected. This can result in blackheads, whiteheads, pimples, or cysts.

What doesn't cause acne?

Acne is **not** caused by diet, poor hygiene, or infection from contact with someone who has acne. Even though bacteria can infect plugged oil glands, bacteria do not cause acne, and acne is not contagious.

What can worsen acne?

- Hair or skin products, such as moisturizers or foundation, that clog pores.
- Sweating can worsen acne in some people.
- Pressure from tight clothing, such as bra straps or chin straps, and frequent hand contact, such as resting your face in your hands, can worsen acne at the point of contact.
- Overwashing skin (more than twice daily) or using scrubs, harsh cleansers, or toners with alcohol.
- Some medications, including oral corticosteroids, oral contraceptives containing only progesterone, and anticonvulsants. Ask your healthcare provider about any medications you may be using.
- Menstrual cycles: some women and girls find acne worsens before their period.
- Picking, squeezing, or popping pimples can worsen acne, spread infection, and cause scarring.
- Exposure to sun or tanning beds.
- Stress can affect hormones and indirectly worsen acne.

What can I do to help my acne?

- Wash your face once or (at the most) twice daily with a gentle or soapless cleanser.
- Wash makeup brushes with antimicrobial soap to eliminate bacteria on them.
- Wash pillowcases and sheets often to remove oil that has been absorbed from your skin.
- Give your skin a break from makeup at least once a week.
- Use only noncomedogenic skin products and oil-free makeup. These products do not promote clogging of pores and are usually labelled "noncomedogenic."
- Shave lightly (once only) in the direction of hair growth.

What do I need to know about my acne treatment?

- Learn about acne so you can be a partner with your doctor in your treatment.
- There are many options for treating acne.
- Treatment takes a stepwise approach that usually starts with topical treatments (creams, gels or lotions).
- Your skin may temporarily get worse before it gets better; it can take six to eight weeks to see the full benefit from some acne treatments.
- Follow the prescription instructions to minimize potential skin irritation from topical treatments.
- For topical treatments, apply a *thin* layer of medication to the entire area, not just individual pimples.
- If you wear makeup, apply your acne medication and let it dry before applying makeup. Use sunscreen, as acne medications can increase sun sensitivity.
- Continue your treatment even after acne has improved to prevent new breakouts.
- If the acne medication is drying your skin, use a prescribed or recommended noncomedogenic moisturizer.

Sources: Basak SA, Zaenglein AL. Acne and its management. *Pediatrics in review / American Academy of Pediatrics*. 2013;34:479-97. Teen Acne. Canadian Dermatology Association. Available at <http://www.dermatology.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Teen-Acne2009EN.pdf>.