

# Acne Teen Version

## What is acne?

Acne is a skin condition that occurs when the oil glands in your skin are clogged and become inflamed or infected. More than 90% of teenagers have some acne.

With acne you will probably have:

- whiteheads, which are closed plugged oil glands
- blackheads, which are open plugged oil glands (the oil turns black when it is exposed to air)
- red bumps, which are inflamed oil glands (the larger red bumps are quite painful).

Acne usually appears on your face, neck, and shoulders.

## What causes acne?

Acne is due to an overactivity and plugging of the oil glands. The main cause of acne is an increased levels of hormones during adolescence.

Acne is not caused by diet. A person who has acne does not have to avoid eating fried foods, chocolate, or any other food. Acne is not caused by sexual activity. It is not caused by dirt or by not washing your face often enough.

## How long does it last?

Acne usually lasts until age 20 or even 25. Do not worry about scarring. It is rare for acne to leave scars.

## How is it treated?

There is no medicine at this time that will cure acne. However, good skin care can keep acne under control and at a mild level.

## Basic treatment for all acne

- Wash your skin twice a day and after exercise. The most important time to wash is bedtime. Use a mild soap such as Dove.
- Shampoo your hair daily. Long hair can make acne worse by rubbing against your skin.
- Avoid picking and squeezing. Picking stops acne from healing. Squeezing causes bleeding into the skin and blotches that can last a month.
- Avoid scrubbing your skin or using abrasive soaps. Hard scrubbing of the skin is harmful because it irritates the openings of the oil glands and can cause them to be more tightly closed.
- Avoid putting any oily or greasy substances on your face. Oily and greasy substances make acne worse by blocking oil glands. If you use cosmetics, use water-based cosmetics and wash them off at bedtime.
- Avoid hair tonics or hair creams (especially greasy ones). When you sweat, these substances will spread to your face and aggravate the acne.
- If you are using acne medicine, don't stop using the medicine too soon. It takes 8 weeks to see a good response.

## Treatment

- Benzoyl peroxide 5% lotion or gel This lotion helps to open pimples and unplug blackheads. It also kills bacteria. It is available without a prescription. Apply the lotion once a day at bedtime. Redheads and blonds should apply it every other day for the first 2 weeks. An amount of lotion the size of a pea should be enough to cover most of your face. If your skin becomes red or peels, you are using too much of the medicine or applying it too often. Try using less of it or applying it less often. You may need to use this lotion for several years. Caution: Benzoyl peroxide bleaches clothing, carpets, etc. Apply it only at bedtime and put it on sparingly.
- We like Neutrogena Acne Wash, Proactive, Acne-Free or Murad Acne. If you have tried at least 2 of these products daily for more than 1 month each you may need to come in to be seen to get a prescription strength formula. A lot of OTC products now are prescription strength. The key is using the products daily even when your face is not bad.
- Pimple opening In general, it is better not to "pop" pimples, but most teenagers do it anyway. This can increase healing time by 5 days so try to avoid this.

## Treatment for red bumps

Large red bumps mean the infection has spread beyond the oil gland. If you have several red bumps, you may need an antibiotic. You will need to be seen to get a prescription.

## When should I call my health care provider?

Call during office hours if:

- The acne has not improved after you have treated it with benzoyl peroxide for 2 months.
- It looks infected (large, red, tender bumps).
- You have other concerns or questions.

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