

Acne

What is Acne?

Acne is a disease that affects the skin's oil glands. Your skin has small holes (pores) that are connected to oil glands. These glands are found under the skin and make an oily substance called sebum.

Your pores are connected to the glands by a canal called follicle. Oil carries dead skin cells to the top of your skin through the follicles. A thin piece of hair also grows out through these canals. When a follicle plugs up, a pimple grows on your skin.

Most pimples are found on the face, neck, back, chest and shoulders.

What Causes Acne?

The direct cause of acne is not clear. There are different factors that may cause it:

- hormone increase in the teenage years can cause the oil glands to plug up more often
- heredity (if your parents had acne, you may get it, too)
- starting or stopping birth control pills
- hormone changes during pregnancy
- some types of medicine.

What are the Different Types of Acne?

There are many different types of acne. The most common types are:

- whiteheads: These pimples stay under the skin.
- blackheads: These pimples are on top of the skin and look black. (Dirt doesn't cause a blackhead.)
- papules: These pimples are small pink bumps.
- pustules: These pimples have pus on the top and are red on the bottom.
- cysts: These pimples are deep in the skin and are filled with pus. They are painful and most likely will leave scars.

Who Gets Acne?

Anyone can get acne. It is most common in teenagers and young adults. Heredity (family history) may play a role in who gets acne. If your parents had acne, you may too. For most people, acne goes away by age 30.

What Can Make Acne Worse?

The following things can make acne worse:

- oil-based makeup
- sunscreen
- hair gels and sprays
- oils from machines or cooking
- menstruation
- squeezing or picking at blemishes
- scrubbing your skin hard.

(over)

How Can You Treat Acne?

Acne can be treated in different ways. There are over-the-counter products that can help treat acne. Benzoyl peroxide (Oxy-10[®]) and salicylic acid are two examples. Soaps, such as Cetaphil[®], are also available just for acne.

Antibiotics can help your acne. You can take pills or use an antibiotic cream, lotion or gel over the whole area that has blemishes. Talk to your health care provider about what might be best for your care.

It may take about 2 months of treatment before your skin starts to look better.

How Can You Take Care of Your Skin?

Here are some ways to care for your skin if you have acne.

- Gently wash your skin with a mild cleanser. Scrubbing your skin will not stop acne.
- Do not squeeze, pick, or pinch your pimples. This can cause scars or dark spots on your skin.
- Limit your time in the sun. Some acne medicines can make you more likely to burn.
- Use makeup that is oil free.

**Information adapted from the
National Institute of Arthritis and
Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases.**