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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. Heredity also plays an important role. 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?

New whiteheads usually stop appearing after 4 to 6 weeks of treatment. Some need to continue the treatment for several years. Acne usually lasts until age 20 or even 25. Do not worry about scarring. It is rare for acne to leave scars.

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, Neutrogena, or Cetaphil.
- Shampoo your hair daily. Pull your hair away from your face. 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



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blocking oil glands. If you use cosmetics, use water-based cosmetics and wash them off at bedtime.

- If you are using acne medicine, don't stop using the medicine too soon. It takes 8 weeks to see a good response.

Treatment for whiteheads/blackheads

- 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. If your skin become 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. Caution: Benzoyl peroxide bleaches clothing, carpets, etc. Apply it only at bedtime and put it on sparingly.

Treatment for red bumps

Large red bumps mean the infection has spread beyond the oil gland. If you have several red bumps, you probably also need an antibiotic. Antibiotics come as solutions for the skin or as pills. Your antibiotic is _____. Use it _____times a day every day.

If you still have problems with acne, talk with your healthcare provider about prescription medicines such as retinoids or hormone pills, or other possible treatments.

When should I call my healthcare 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.