

Treating Acne

It's important to know that there is no true cure for acne. If untreated, it can last for many years, although acne usually clears up as you get older. The following treatments, however, generally can keep acne under control.

1. Use topical benzoyl peroxide lotion or gel

Benzoyl peroxide helps kill skin bacteria, unplug the oil ducts and heal acne pimples. It is the most effective acne treatment you can get without a doctor's prescription. Many brands are available in different levels of strength (2.5 percent, 5 percent or 10 percent). Read the labels or ask your pediatrician or pharmacist about it.

- Start slowly with a 2.5 percent or 5 percent lotion or gel once a day. After a week, increase use to twice a day (morning and night) if your skin isn't too red or isn't peeling.
- Apply a thin film to the entire area where pimples may occur. Don't just dab it on current blemishes. Avoid the delicate skin around the eyes, mouth and corner of the nose.
- If your acne isn't better after four to six weeks, you may increase to a 10 percent strength lotion or gel. Start with one application each day and increase to two daily applications if your skin tolerates it.

2. If you don't see results, consult your pediatrician

Your doctor can prescribe stronger treatments, if needed, and will teach you how to use them properly. Three kinds of medications may be recommended:

- TRETINOIN (RETIN-A) CREAM OR GEL helps unplug oil ducts but must be used exactly as directed. Be aware that exposure to the sun (or tanning parlors) can cause increased redness in some people who are using the medication.
- TOPICAL ANTIBIOTIC SOLUTIONS may be used in addition to other medications for a type of acne called pustular acne.
- ORAL ANTIBIOTIC PILLS may be used in addition to creams, lotions or gels if your acne doesn't respond to topical treatments alone.

3. What about the "miracle drug" Accutane?

Isotretinoin (Accutane) is a very strong chemical taken in pill form. It is used only for severe cystic acne that hasn't responded to any other treatment. Accutane must NEVER be taken just before or during pregnancy. There is a danger of severe or even fatal deformities to unborn babies whose mothers have taken Accutane while pregnant or who become pregnant soon after taking Accutane. You should never have unprotected sexual intercourse while taking Accutane. Patients who take Accutane must be carefully supervised by a doctor knowledgeable about its usage, such as a pediatric dermatologist or other expert on treating acne. Your pediatrician may require a negative pregnancy test and a signed consent form before prescribing Accutane to females.

If you are experiencing acne problems, remember that your pediatrician can help you. And as you begin treatment, keep these helpful tips in mind:

- **Be patient.** It takes three to six weeks to see any improvement. Give each treatment enough time to work.
- **Be faithful.** Follow your program every day. Don't stop and start each time your skin changes. Remember, sometimes your skin may appear to worsen early in the program before you begin to see improvement.
- **Follow directions.** Not using the treatment as directed is the most common reason the treatment fails.
- **Don't use medication prescribed for someone else.** This holds true for all medications, especially Accutane. Doctors prescribe medication specifically for particular patients. What's good for a friend may be harmful for you. Never take Accutane that's prescribed for another person.
- **Don't overdo it.** Too much scrubbing makes skin worse. Too much benzoyl peroxide or Retin-A cream makes your face red and scaly. Too much oral antibiotic may cause side effects.

A Word About ... Acne and Birth Control Pills

In 1996, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a low-dose birth control pill to be used as an effective treatment for acne in women over 15 years of age. Research has shown that certain birth control pills lower the levels of hormones that cause acne.

However, taking birth control pills along with other medications for the prevention of acne may reduce the effectiveness of both medications. If you are taking birth control pills, talk to your pediatrician about their effect on acne.

Finally, many people don't understand acne and may say hurtful things about it. Although acne may bother you, keep in mind it's only temporary. With present-day treatment, it usually can be controlled.