

ACNE

Introduction

Technically called acne vulgaris, Acne is the term for plugged pores (blackheads and whiteheads), pimples, and even deeper lumps (cysts or nodules) that occur on the face, neck, chest, back, shoulders and even the upper arms. Acne affects most teenagers to some extent and can vary from quite mild to extremely severe.

Acne usually develops when the [sebaceous gland](#) surrounding a [hair follicle](#) begins to work overtime, as they do in adolescence. Normally, the lining of the hair follicle sheds cells that are carried to the surface of the skin by the sebum. When the follicle is overworked and clogged, cells and sebum accumulate, forming a plug (comedo). If the plug stays below the surface of the skin, it is called a "closed" comedo or whitehead. If the plug enlarges and pops out of the duct, it is called an "open" [comedo](#) (plural comedo) or blackhead because the top is dark. This is not dirt and will not wash away. The discoloration is due to the way light is absorbed by the skin cells within the opening.

Causes of Acne

About 80 percent of all teenagers develop acne, but this disease can also begin as late as the ages 25 or 30, particularly for women. No one is certain as to what exactly causes acne or why it usually begins in adolescence, but hormones, primarily testosterone, certainly play a large role. A number of other factors such as hereditary are also important. If one of your parents had acne, there's a good chance you will, too.

Symptoms

There are two main types of acne: non-inflammatory and inflammatory.

Non-inflammatory acne usually has just a few whiteheads and blackheads on the face. A relatively mild type of acne, it can often be treated effectively with non-prescription medicines. The majority of people with acne have this type of acne.

With inflammatory acne, the whiteheads become inflamed and red pimples and pustules develop. In its most severe form, inflammatory acne can cause disfiguring cysts and deep, pitting scars of the face, neck, back, chest and groin. Prescription drugs and sometimes surgery are needed to treat inflammatory acne.

Treatments

For Mild Acne doctors suggest the following to clear up mild acne - get a non-prescription acne medicine and apply regularly. Over-the-counter drugs containing sulfur, resorcinol, salicylic acid, and benzoyl peroxide, are all effective for treating mild acne. Use ordinary hygiene on affected areas, washing your face once or twice daily with your usual soap or cleanser. Deodorant soaps may be used, but they are of no particular value for acne.

- Do not scrub or use a loofa brush as friction only makes acne worse.
- Do not pick or squeeze any spots. This may worsen scarring.

If home treatments do not work, acne can be treated effectively by your GP or consultant dermatologist. Options may include:

- Topical treatments such as retinoids (tretinoin, tazarotene, or adapalene) or antibiotics (benzoyl peroxide, clindamycin)
- Oral antibiotics
- Hormonal medications like oral contraceptives

In severe cases, an oral medication called isotretinoin (Accutane) may be prescribed. This is extremely effective, but side effects may include severe birth defects, changes in blood fats and cholesterol, and mood changes. Because of these side effects, Accutane is usually used only for patients with severe acne, or, in patients who have failed all other treatments.

As with most diseases, acne responds best if treatment is begun early in the course of the disease. Treating your acne before it becomes severe may also help to reduce permanent scarring.

[Sources: NHS Direct, NIH (USA), www.skincarephysicians.com/acnetnet]