



Teens + Acne



SOMETIMES PUBERTY STINKS

Yep, the hormones that help you get taller and mature in many ways have some drawbacks. They can cause acne. Acne can be a little problem or a big one. But the good news is: Acne is treatable.

What causes acne?

Short answer: Acne happens when some of your pores, the hair follicles, are plugged with oil and dead skin cells.

Longer answer: There are four main things that cause acne. They are:

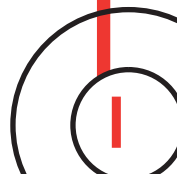
- Excess oil. This is called sebum.
- Hair follicles clogged by oil and dead skin cells.
- Bacteria.
- Inflammation.

Acne usually shows up on the face, forehead, chest, upper back and shoulders. That's where your skin has the most oil glands. Oil glands are also called sebaceous glands. Your hair follicles are connected to your oil glands.

Other pores in your skin are the openings of your sweat glands. They usually aren't involved in acne.

Want more info?

If you have questions after you read this, feel free to call the care team that's treating your acne. They've helped hundreds of teens with acne. They understand how acne can make you look and feel. Your care team is here to help you!



What kind of acne do you have?

There is just one diagnosis: acne. But it shows up in different ways. It all depends on what's under and on top of your skin.

- **Whiteheads** are widened pores in the skin that are plugged. This is called a closed plug. The pore is filled with skin debris, bacteria and oil.
- **Blackheads** are plugged pores that are open. They look closed because they're full of oil and debris. The dark color happens when oil mixes with the body's skin-coloring agent, called melanin, and that mixture is exposed to air.
- **Papules** are small, red, tender bumps.
- **Pimples** are papules with pus at their tips. Pimples are also called pustules. (But it's a lot easier to call them zits.)
- **Nodules** are large, solid, painful lumps under the skin. Severe forms may be called nodulocystic acne.
- **Cystic lesions**, or cysts, are pus-filled lumps under the skin. These may be hard, and they may be painful when touched.



TRIGGERS AND MYTHS

Some things may trigger acne or make it worse

- **Hormonal changes.** Androgens are hormones that increase in teens during puberty and cause the sebaceous glands to enlarge and make more sebum.
- **Certain medications.** Examples include drugs containing corticosteroids, testosterone or lithium.
- **Diet.** Doctors are just not sure how what you eat relates to acne. But they are doing studies to try to figure it out. If you're wondering about your diet, you could contact a member of your health care team.
- **Stress.** Stress doesn't cause acne, but if you have acne, stress may make it worse.

Some things have almost nothing to do with acne

These are famous acne myths:

- **Greasy foods.** Eating greasy food has little to no effect on acne.
- **Dirty skin.** Acne isn't caused by dirty skin. In fact, scrubbing the skin too hard or cleaning with harsh soaps or chemicals will irritate your skin. This can make acne worse. Just wash as usual: Use soap or a gentle skin cleanser + water + a light rubbing with hands or fingertips. This will help clear out your pores.
- **Cosmetics.** Cosmetics used in moderation don't necessarily make acne worse, especially if you use oil-free makeup and you wash it off before you go to sleep. Avoid using a lot of foundation and acne cover-up make-up. Using too much product draws more attention to the problem area. Look for noncomedogenic or nonacnegenic on the product label. Noncomedogenic means it won't clog or block your pores. Nonacnegenic means the product isn't likely to cause acne.

P.S. Non-oily cosmetics do not stop an acne medication from working. That's another myth.



WANT TO MAKE ACNE GO AWAY?

There are a lot of thing you can do to reduce the amount of acne you get, even though you can't make it go away 100%. Only time can do that. **The key is to be consistent in how you care for your skin.**

*Check out the self-care and treatment tips here.
Do these things every day. Make skin care a habit,
like brushing your teeth. (That is a habit for
you, right?!)*



Self-care at home

- **Don't touch, squeeze or pick at your acne.** Seriously, it may seem like that zit goes away after you pop it. But when you pick a zit:
 - You spread much of the bacteria that used to be inside the zit all over the nearby skin.
 - You push some of the bacteria deeper into your skin. This likely will lead to another zit.
 - You bruise the skin **and risk scarring it.**
 - You probably inflame a pore that's already irritated.
- Clean your face 1 to 2 times a day with a gentle skin cleanser and warm water.
- Use make-up and sunscreen that is noncomedogenic or nonacnegenic. Both of these mean that the product won't clog pores.
- Keep hair gel and spray away from your face and neck.
- Wash your hair often enough to keep oil off it.
- If you work around cooking oil, like in a fast-food restaurant, or you sweat a lot, be sure to wash your face, neck and other exposed skin as soon as you get home.
- Even though doctors aren't sure how food relates to acne, pay attention to any connection your acne may have with food. If you think some particular food may be a trigger for you, stop eating that food for a few weeks. See if your acne gets better.

You may not have to ditch that food 100%. Just try to cut back on foods that trigger breakouts. **And remember that you still need to eat a healthy, balanced diet.**



For girls

For many teens, acne may flare up about a week before their period. There's nothing special to do about this. Your usual good self-care should help.

Treatment with products

In addition to the self-care tips, there are other things you can try, like the products shared here. You can buy these at many retail stores. Be sure to read the teeny tiny print on and in the product package. This may include information about side effects.

- **Benzoyl peroxide:** Benzoyl peroxide kills bacteria and opens clogged pores.

This medication:

- Is used on top of the skin (topically).
- Is sold as a face wash, lotion and cream.
- Comes in varying strengths from 2.5 to 10%. You'll want to start with the lowest strength you can find.

Note: Benzoyl peroxide can bleach all the color out of clothing and towels. So wear old clothes and use old towels when you apply it and when you wash your face at the end of the day.



You may be able to get advice about acne treatment without going in to see your doctor. If needed, call or reach out online to ask your care team about this.

- **Salicylic acid:** Salicylic acid is a common medication used on top of the skin to treat acne. It causes the cells of the outer layer of skin to fall off more easily. This layer is called the epidermis. When the skin falls off, it helps keep your pores open. And it allows room for new cell growth.
Salicylic acid works best for mild acne, such as blackheads and whiteheads. It also may help prevent future breakouts.
 - It is sold in many forms, such as gel, lotion, ointment, liquid and soap.
 - It comes in strengths ranging from 0.5 to 2%.
- **Adapalene:** Adapalene is a retinoid product used to treat mild and moderate acne. It works to stop pimples from forming under the surface of the skin. This product helps to control acne, but it does not cure it. **Note:** Your acne may get worse during the first few weeks of this treatment.

For each of these products:

- Use just a little of the product and don't use it every day at first. Your skin needs time to get used to it.
- Be patient. It usually takes at least 8 weeks before you'll see changes in your skin.
- Shop smart. Store brands can work just as well as more expensive name-brand products.

Prescription medication: If needed, talk to your health care provider about getting a prescription for a stronger acne medication. Be sure to ask about precautions you should take. Use the medication as directed on the package.



If you are a person of color

Your skin may become darker or lighter in areas where acne has healed. Also, acne medication can cause skin irritation. This may temporarily affect your skin pigment. Talk to your doctor about which products may be better for you. Also ask how often you should use an acne product.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Nearly every teen has acne. But it feels so personal. It's easy to think that everyone is staring at you — or at least that everyone sees your acne. What's hard to remember is this: Most teens are focused on themselves. Try not to worry about what other people think. Just take care of yourself.

- **Follow the skin-care ideas shared here.** Every day. See the Treatment section.
- **Be patient.** Change won't happen in a day or two.
- **Ask for help if needed.** Many teens struggle with worry about their appearance. If you find yourself thinking about your acne a lot, or you pop, squeeze or poke at your skin a lot, tell your doctor. It may help if you have someone to talk to about this.
- **Don't overdo it.** Use just a little of the product and don't use it every day at first. Your skin needs time to get used to it. Don't use more product because you think it will make acne go away faster. That likely won't happen. But you definitely could inflame your skin or scar it. That may be more visible than some small acne.
- **Follow the directions on any products you use.** Or, if your care team gives you different directions, follow those directions.

When to see a doctor

If self-care and typical treatments don't lessen your acne, see your primary care doctor. This is the doctor you usually see for routine checkups and preventive care. He or she can prescribe stronger medications. Some people with severe acne see a dermatologist, a doctor who specializes in skin care. Your primary care provider can help you decide if you need to see a dermatologist. You may need a referral to see this specialist.

Note: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warns that some popular nonprescription acne lotions, cleansers and other skin products can cause a serious skin reaction. This type of reaction is very rare. Don't confuse it with the common redness, irritation or itchiness that happens in areas where you've applied skin medications or products.

When to get emergency help!

Get emergency help if you have any of these reactions after you use a skin product:

- Faintness
- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips or tongue
- Tightness of the throat

Some of these reactions may be signs of an allergic reaction. If needed, call 911 or your local emergency service. Or have someone drive you to the nearest emergency care center.

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