

Acne

Acne tends to start at puberty and leads to greasy skin and 'spots'. People may feel bad about themselves because of the way their skin looks, often at a time when they are already vulnerable.

Acne affects more than 8 out of 10 teenagers to some degree, and more frequently boys. Around 1 in 3 teenagers have acne bad enough to need treatment. In some women, acne is more common around the time of their periods.

Acne is caused by inflamed skin glands on your face and upper trunk. In *rare* cases, acne may be caused by an underlying medical condition, such as *polycystic ovary disease (PCO)* or other hormonal disorders. It's a myth that stress or certain foods (such as chocolate) cause acne – and acne is certainly not due to a lack of cleanliness!

In 7 out of 10 people, acne stops within five years – but some people may suffer lifelong.

Managing your condition

Acne is a long-term condition that may need immediate treatment for treating severely affected skin, and maintenance therapy to keep spots from recurring.

How can I avoid triggers/ suggested lifestyle changes

It may be possible improve symptoms by making a few simple changes; these self-help techniques may be useful:

Do's

- Wash the affected area with a mild soap or cleanser and lukewarm water. Very hot or cold water can make acne worse.
- Completely remove make-up before going to bed.
- Wash your hair regularly and try to avoid letting your hair fall across your face.
- If using cosmetics use water-based products which are less likely to block the pores in your skin.
- Try to exercise more, regular exercise can't improve your acne, but it can boost your mood and improve your self-esteem. Shower as soon as possible once you finish exercising, as sweat can irritate your acne.
- If dry skin is a problem, use a fragrance-free, water-based emollient.

Don'ts

- Don't wash affected areas of skin more than twice a day. Frequent washing can irritate the skin and make symptoms worse.
- Don't try to "clean out" blackheads or squeeze spots. This can make them worse and cause permanent scarring.
- Don't use too much make-up and cosmetics.

How do I treat?

Although acne can't be cured, it can be controlled with treatment. Several creams, lotions and gels for treating spots are available at pharmacies.

- **Speak to your pharmacist** - for advice if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms. Products containing a low concentration of benzoyl peroxide may be recommended – but be careful, as this can bleach clothing.
- If your acne is severe or appears on your chest and back, it may need to be treated with antibiotics or stronger creams that are only available on prescription. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is required.

When should I seek advice?

Seek advice from your pharmacist or GP if initial treatment with over the counter preparations doesn't work for you, if acne significantly impairs your quality of life, or if any of the following warning symptoms are present:

- **Severity** - Your acne is really bad and you feel physically unwell because of it.
- **Pain** - You develop painful spots that feel 'deep' in your skin.
- **Distress** - You get distressed by your acne, and/or it affects your social life.
- **Scarring** - You notice the beginning of scarring despite treatment.
- **Possible underlying medical causes** - You suspect that you may have an underlying medical condition that causes your acne – for example, if you have additional symptoms such as infrequent or absent periods, excessive hair growth, or hair loss.

More information is available at the following website

- NHS website - www.nhs.uk
- Or visit your local pharmacy for advice

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