

What You Should Know About Acne

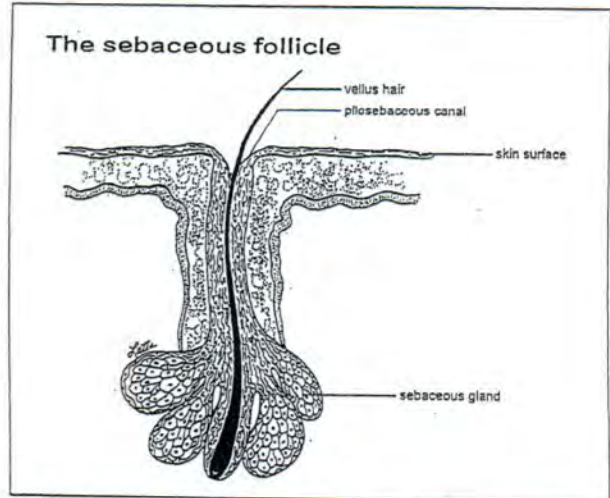
Acne is a skin problem that begins about the time someone becomes a teenager and usually goes away as he or she gets older. Almost every teenager gets acne, but some people develop more pimples than others. During the time that a person has acne, it can be made better but it can't be cured. This means that medicines that can make acne better need to be used for a long time. This information sheet is meant to help you understand acne and how to make it better.

What causes acne?

Pimples begin in certain pores or openings in the skin. These pores have oil glands connected to them. At puberty, the time that you begin to grow into an adult, certain chemicals, called hormones, cause the oil glands to make more oil. You may have noticed that your skin became more oily before acne began. The oil and cells that line your pores stick together and cause a plug or block in the pore. The result is a blackhead or whitehead. The blackhead is not dirt and scrubbing or washing won't remove it. Whiteheads are the beginnings of larger pimples. The oil and other material in whiteheads may break through the pore wall and cause irritation under the skin—a pimple.

What makes acne worse?

- If you pinch, pop or pick at pimples you may cause them to become larger, take longer to disappear or scar.
- Washing too often or with harsh soaps may irritate the skin and make it hard to use the medicines that are prescribed by your doctor. To prevent this, wash only once or twice a day with a mild soap.
- Some makeups, cover-ups or hair greases may block pores and make your acne worse. If you use makeup or moisturizers, choose those that are oil-free and labeled as *non-acnegenic* or *noncomedogenic*. If you use a hair grease, try not to get it on the skin.
- Equipment (like helmets or chinstraps) or tight clothing that puts pressure on the skin may make acne worse in this area.
- Many young women notice a worsening of acne before a menstrual period. This is caused by changes in hormones.
- For some teenagers, stress may make acne worse.



Original art adapted from Tunnessen, WW. "Help your acne patients help themselves," CONTEMPORARY PEDIATRICS, September 1984, Figure 1, page 12.

- Foods like chocolate, other sweets or french fries almost never make acne worse.

How do we treat acne?

Acne does not go away overnight with treatment. It takes time—more time than you would like—to unblock the pores. In fact, it takes 6 to 8 weeks of using medicine before you see a change in your skin. Try to be patient. Don't give up too soon.

There are a number of medicines we may use. Some work better for some people than others. We need your help to tell us which ones work best for you. Sometimes we need to use more than one medicine.

Using topical medications (those placed on the skin):

Many of the medicines used to treat acne (like benzoyl peroxide, tretinoin and certain antibiotics) are placed on the skin. There are a few basic rules about using these medicines:

