

# Acne

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Almost every adolescent experiences some type of acne problem. Without proper treatment and skin care, some acne can scar the skin. In order to reduce the occurrence of acne breakouts and prevent scarring, it is important to understand the causes of acne and know what the most effective methods of acne treatment are.

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## Causes of Acne

An acne problem occurs when overactive sebaceous glands produce too much oil and plug follicles in the skin. There is some confusion, however, about what causes this to happen more with some people and not as much with others. Effective acne treatment and prevention of acne scar formation depends upon a clear understanding of the real causes of acne and how they can be effectively addressed.

- **Genetics:** The primary causes of acne are biological. During adolescence, the skin cells lining the inside of hair follicles begin to shed heavily, and the skin's oil production increases. As a result, the hair follicles become plugged, and acne eruptions appear on the skin. The degree to which acne develops is determined primarily by genetics. A teenager whose parents suffered from moderate or severe acne will most likely have a similar acne problem. A cosmetic dermatologist can provide effective acne treatment to alleviate even the most extensive acne problem and use advanced acne scar removal procedures to help restore a clear, healthy complexion.
- **Medication:** Some types of medication can also cause acne, but this occurrence is rare in comparison to genetically linked acne. Drugs that have been shown to cause acne include anabolic steroids and corticosteroids, some anticonvulsants, lithium, isoniazid and rifampin, immunosuppressants, and drugs containing iodine. If you are taking any of these medications and suspect that the medication may be the cause of your acne problem, do NOT stop taking it.

Instead, speak with your doctor to see if you can change medications or to determine an appropriate acne treatment.

- **Oily Skin:** Contrary to common belief, acne is not caused by oily skin. However, because oily skin and acne are both caused by the excess production of oil by sebaceous glands during adolescence, oily skin is often mistaken as the cause of acne. Acne is caused primarily by clogged follicles under the surface of the skin, not by oil on the skin. For controlling acne, good skin care habits that include daily washing are important to maintain skin health and clear excess oil from the skin. However, excessive washing and harsh products can irritate skin and possibly cause an acne scar problem.
- **The Foods You Eat:** Many people believe that certain foods cause or worsen an acne problem, but diet has very little influence on acne. Eating a balanced and healthy diet can improve overall health. Avoiding foods that appear to aggravate your skin problems may help lessen the severity of an acne breakout, but changing what you eat is not an effective acne treatment.
- **Stress:** There is some evidence to suggest that stress may aggravate an acne problem, but it is not a primary cause. In many cases, a particularly bad acne flare-up is the source of stress, rather than a result of it. Stress management techniques can help improve overall physical and mental health, but they are not an effective acne treatment.
- **Hormonal Changes:** In many people, hormonal changes trigger acne. The hormonal shifts that take place during puberty are partially responsible for initiating an adolescent's acne problem. Some women have breakouts that occur or worsen at certain points in the menstrual cycle or during pregnancy. However, the primary factor that determines whether acne will appear is genetics.

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## Acne Prevention

Since the causes of acne are closely tied to genetic predisposition, there is no way of truly preventing acne. However, there are many types of acne treatment available that are designed to prevent pimples from forming once acne has begun to appear. Also, there are several ways to avoid making an existing acne problem worse and to prevent a lesion from becoming an acne scar.

Acne lesions of any kind should not be picked at, squeezed, or scratched.

Scrubbing or using harsh products to clean areas affected by acne will only

irritate the skin and make an acne problem worse. Proper acne skin care can be achieved by washing gently with a mild cleanser. Makeup, often used to hide acne lesions, can sometimes aggravate the problem. Wearing as little makeup as possible and using products that do not clog pores can help prevent acne breakouts.

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## Acne Treatment

The degree of the acne problem determines the right treatment. Practicing good skin care can help control mild acne, but scar tissue can result if moderate to severe cases are not addressed by a dermatologist. A cosmetic dermatologist can prescribe from a wide range of acne medications that are either topical (placed on the skin) or taken internally. A dermatologist can also perform effective acne treatment procedures to control acne breakouts and reduce or eliminate acne scars. Different treatments target different causes of acne, and dermatologists often combine treatments to maximize effectiveness.

### Medication

Popular topical medications for treating acne include benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid. Most over-the-counter acne treatments contain one of these medications. A more potent topical acne treatment is the prescription medication Tretinoin, commonly sold as Retin-A®, Renova®, or Avita™. For severe acne cases, a dermatologist may prescribe Isotretinoin, also known as Accutane®, which is a very powerful oral retinoid. Each of these medications is effective on certain types of acne and each has its own benefits, risks, and potential side effects. A dermatologist can help determine which acne treatment is best for you.

### Professional Dermatological Treatments

In addition to providing effective medications for acne treatment, a qualified dermatologist can also administer effective procedures to address an acne problem. Acne chemical peels can remove the blackheads and papules associated with mild acne. **Blue light therapy, also known as ClearLight™**, is a relatively new technology that has provided good results for patients with inflammatory acne. **Photodynamic therapy with Levulan®** is a treatment that uses the same blue light in combination with a topical drug that intensifies the

light's effect on the skin. An **Intense Pulsed Light (IPL™) Photofacial** can also effectively treat acne by destroying the bacteria that triggers acne inflammation.

#### Adopt a Skin Care Regimen

While keeping the skin clean will not prevent acne from occurring, good acne skin care will minimize the chances of infection and help existing acne lesions heal. Dermatologists recommend washing the face twice a day with water and a gentle cleanser. Do not scrub or use very hot water. Washing more frequently or using harsh products will only irritate the skin, inhibit healing, and increase the chances of an acne scar.

Acne medications and acne treatment products must be used as prescribed and on a regular schedule in order to work properly. By creating a specific acne skin care routine, you will make it easier to remember to use the medications and products as prescribed, and your treatment will be more successful.

Because some types of cosmetics, moisturizers, and other products can aggravate an acne problem or dry out the skin, it is important to discuss with your dermatologist any skin care products you are using when you seek treatment.

#### Treating Acne Scars

Although it is generally a temporary condition, severe acne can leave a scar problem that can last a lifetime. A cosmetic dermatologist can provide a variety of procedures for acne scar removal or reduction. Microdermabrasion, **deep chemical peels**, and laser skin resurfacing have all been shown to effectively reduce or eliminate acne scars. The right acne scar removal treatment for each patient depends on the degree of acne scarring, skin type, and other factors. A cosmetic dermatologist can recommend the procedure that is best for you.