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## Acne

Acne is caused by a combination of bacteria, hormones, and clogged pores. Diet does not affect acne for most patients (however, a recent study did show that eating chocolate can worsen acne). If you notice that a certain food tends to aggravate your acne, simply avoid that food, otherwise you may eat what you want. Use a mild soap (CeraVe, Cetaphil, Neutrogena) to wash your face. Acne is not caused by a dirty face. Harsh soaps and vigorous scrubbing can actually make your acne worse. You should not pick at your acne because this can increase the risk of scarring. Remember, it takes time and regular use of your medication to improve your acne. Your medications help prevent acne as well as treat existing acne and should be used regularly as prescribed. They won't help if they just sit in your medicine cabinet.

### **Acne Extractions**

Acne extractions (acne surgery) can give you a jump start to clearing your skin without having to wait 4-8 weeks for your medication to begin to work. Expression of the comedones will eliminate the unwanted pimples and provide clearer skin immediately, while the medication prescribed will prevent the formation of new pimples and treat any new acne. There is only minimal discomfort with the procedure.

### **Benzoyl-Peroxide**

Action: Benzoyl-Peroxide helps open up clogged pores and helps kill bacteria in the pores.

Use: Gels and creams should be applied to the entire face (usually in the morning) to help treat existing acne and help prevent future acne. Benzoyl Peroxide washes should be lathered up and left on for about 10 seconds.

Side Effects: Benzoyl peroxide can cause mild facial irritation (redness or stinging). This can usually be corrected by using a mild moisturizer (Lubriderm, Neutrogena) one or two times per day. If moisturizers do not help, use the medication every other day for 3 weeks and then move back up to every day. This usually corrects the problem. Benzoyl peroxide can bleach washcloths, shower curtains, pillow cases so be sure to wash it off your hands after using.

### **Topical Retinoids (Retin A, tretinoin, Differin, Atralin, Ziana, Tazorac)**

Action: Retinoids prevent skin cells from sticking to one another so that pores don't get clogged. It helps to treat existing acne, but more importantly, helps to prevent future acne formation.

Use: Wash your face with a mild soap (CeraVe, Cetaphil, Neutrogena). Dry thoroughly. Apply retinoid to your entire face (usually at bedtime). Do not apply any other creams to your face (especially benzoyl peroxide or other acne medications/washes) because they can inactivate the retinoids.

Side Effects: Retinoids can cause mild facial irritation (redness or stinging). This can usually be corrected by using a mild moisturizer (CeraVe, Cetaphil, Neutrogena,) one or two times per day. If moisturizers do not help, use the medication every other day for 3 weeks and then move back up to every day. This usually corrects the problem. Sun exposure can increase the facial irritation in some patients. Using an SPF 15-30 sunscreen on the face and moisturizers should prevent any problems in sensitive individuals.

### **Antibiotics**

Action: Antibiotics kill the bacteria that cause red pimples (inflammatory papules) and deep cystic pimples (acne cysts). Topical antibiotics work for superficial acne, if you have deeper acne, oral antibiotics are usually required.

Use: Topical antibiotics are applied to the entire face 1 or 2 times per day as directed. They can be applied after benzoyl peroxide. Antibiotic pills are usually taken 2 times a day (before breakfast and before bed). Tetracycline must be taken on an empty stomach or it will not be absorbed. Other antibiotics work better if you take them on an empty stomach, but can be taken with food if necessary.

Side Effects: Topical Antibiotics: rarely people get mild dryness or irritation, usually no side effects.

Tetracycline (inexpensive, works well): Can cause upset stomach in about 10% of patients. It makes you a little more sensitive to the sun. If you are going to be out in the sun for longer than 20 minutes, sunscreen SPF 15 or greater should be applied. In women, it can increase the frequency of yeast infections. It, theoretically, may make birth control pills less effective.

Doxycycline (more expensive, works better): The old doxycycline and generic doxycycline are absorbed in the stomach and have a high incidence of sun sensitivity. The new doxycycline (Doryx – brand) is a pellet that by-passes the stomach and is only absorbed in the small intestine. This has almost completely eliminated the sun-sensitivity side effect. Some people get a little light headed. It, theoretically, may make birth control pills less effective. It does not get deposited in the skin or give the rare “lupus-like” symptoms that could potentially be seen with minocycline. It is generally taken one time per day. It is not known if it is as effective as minocycline however.

Minocycline (much more expensive, works better): Can cause lightheadedness in a small number of people. Long term use can lead to some of the medicine being deposited in the skin. This shows up as small blue spots in the mouth, on the face, on lower legs, and in scars. It almost always goes away when you stop the medicine. In women, it can increase the frequency of yeast infections. It, theoretically, may make birth control pills less effective. Rarely, people may develop “lupus-like” symptoms with muscle and joint aches and fatigue.

Erythromycin (inexpensive, works somewhat): Can cause upset stomach in about 25% of patients. If this happens, try taking it with food or taking an antacid (Tums, Rolaids) when the symptoms develop. In women, it can increase the frequency of yeast infections. It, theoretically, may make birth control pills less effective.

Other antibiotics: There are other antibiotics that can be tried, such as Bactrim (sulfa), cephalexin.

### **Isotretinoin (Accutane, Amnesteem, Claravis, Sotret)**

Isotretinoin can potentially “cure” acne, but is a very expensive therapy. There are some significant side effects that must be endured. Isotretinoin is a teratogen, which means that it can cause birth defects if you become pregnant. Therefore females of childbearing potential must be on birth control during therapy. Lab tests are drawn on a monthly basis during therapy to monitor for potential serious side effects. Monthly appointments are required by law to obtain a prescription for isotretinoin. Average length of therapy is 5-6 months.

If you are a woman and you become pregnant, stop all of your acne medicine immediately and contact your doctor.

If you have any questions or problems with your acne medication, please feel free to contact your doctor or nurse at the clinic.