

Acne

What causes acne?

Most people who get acne start having it in the early teen years. This is when the oil glands in the body start making more oil (sebum). Some people also have too many “sticky” skin cells. In people with acne, these cells mix with the oil and plug up the hair follicles on the skin surface. These plugs trap bacteria in the follicles, which can cause the follicles to swell.

- Whitehead - A whitehead results when the follicle is plugged with oil and skin cells.
- Blackhead - If this plug reaches the surface of the skin and the air touches it, it turns black and is called a blackhead. A blackhead isn't caused by dirt.

If the wall of the plugged follicle breaks, the area swells and turns into a red bump. If the follicle wall breaks near the skin surface, the bump usually becomes a pimple. If the wall breaks deeper beneath the skin, acne nodules or cysts can form. This is called cystic acne. It's the type most likely to lead to scars.

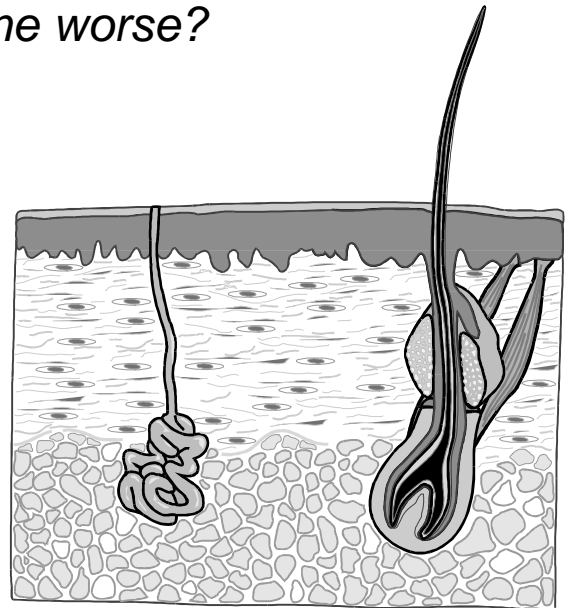
Who gets acne?

- Girls
- Boys – it may be worse in boys because they have more skin oils.
- Heredity plays a role in who gets acne. If your mother and father had bad acne, you may too.
- Your immune system also plays a role. Some people are extra sensitive to the bacteria that get trapped in the hair follicles. This can cause very bad acne.
- Foods don't seem to be related to acne. But if you feel that some foods make your acne worse, you may want to avoid those foods.

Are there any things that may make acne worse?

The following things may make acne worse:

- Stress and strong emotions like guilt, anxiety and fear
- Menstruation
- Squeezing or picking at pimples
- Scrubbing the skin hard



How can acne be treated?

Acne can be treated in many ways. The main thing to remember is that it will take about two months of treatment before your skin starts to look better.

- **Benzoyl peroxide** (Clear by Design, Oxy-5, Oxy-10, etc.) clears up acne for many people. You can get benzoyl peroxide without a prescription. It comes in gel, lotion, cream or pad forms. Before using benzoyl peroxide, gently wash the skin with soap and water. Blot your skin dry. Begin with a 2.5% to 5% gel, lotion or cream. Spread it over the whole area where you have pimples (not just dabbing it onto each pimple). Use it once a day at bedtime. Your doctor may tell you to use it once a day at first and then work up to two times a day. If benzoyl peroxide doesn't seem to help after two months or is very irritating to your skin, get advice from your doctor. Be careful: it can bleach clothing.
- **Antibiotics** can be very effective for acne. They can be taken by mouth or used in a lotion, cream or gel on the skin. Again, be sure to apply the lotion, cream or gel over the whole area where you have blemishes.
- **Tretinoin** (Retin-A) can be effective for treating acne. It's usually rubbed onto the skin once a day. Be sure not to get it near your eyes, mouth and the area under your nose. It may seem at first that tretinoin is making your acne worse. Give it several weeks to start working. If you use tretinoin, you must avoid the sun or use a strong sunscreen. **Tretinoin increases your risk of getting a very bad sunburn.**
- **Isotretinoin** (Accutane) may be needed to treat severe cystic acne that doesn't get better with other treatments. It can be effective in treating this type of acne and in preventing scars. It's taken once a day by mouth for 15 to 20 weeks. Isotretinoin can cause serious side effects. **It has been connected with serious birth defects and miscarriages.** It should never be taken during pregnancy or even one month before pregnancy. If you're a girl, you must use two types of birth control or not have sex while you're taking isotretinoin, as well as one month before and one month after you start taking it. Talk to your doctor and follow directions carefully if he or she prescribes isotretinoin for you.

How can I avoid getting scars?

You can help reduce scarring by not squeezing or picking at pimples. Avoid scrubbing your skin hard. Gentle washing is better.

If you have further questions about acne – ask your health provider.

