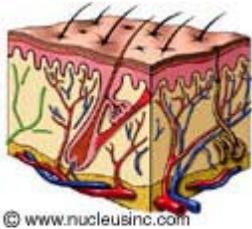




## PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

### Acne Vulgaris

#### Topic Overview



#### What is acne vulgaris?

Acne vulgaris, or acne, is a skin problem that starts when oil and dead skin cells clog up your pores. Some people call it blackheads, blemishes, whiteheads, pimples, or zits.

When you have just a few red spots, or pimples, you have a mild form of acne. Severe acne can mean hundreds of pimples that can cover the face, neck, chest, and back. Or, it can be bigger, solid, red lumps that are painful (cysts).

Most young people get at least mild acne. It usually gets better after the teen years. But many adult women do have acne in the days before their menstrual periods.

How you feel about your acne may not be related to how bad it is. Some people with severe acne are not bothered by it. Others are embarrassed or upset even though they have only a few pimples.

The good news is that there are many good treatments that can help you get acne under control.

#### What causes acne?

Acne starts when oil and dead skin cells clog the skin's pores. If germs get into the pores, the result can be swelling, redness, and pus. See a picture of [how pimples form](#) .

For most people, acne starts during the teen years. This is because hormone changes make the skin more oily after puberty starts.

You do not get acne from eating chocolate or greasy foods. But you can make it worse by using oily skin products that clog your pores.

Acne can run in families. If one of your parents had severe acne, you are more likely to have it.

#### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of acne include [whiteheads](#), [blackheads](#), and [pimples](#). These can occur on the face, neck, shoulders, back, or chest. Pimples that are large and deep are called [cystic lesions](#). These can be painful if they get infected. They also can scar the skin.

## How is acne treated?

To help control acne, keep your skin clean. Avoid skin products that clog your pores. Look for products that say "noncomedogenic" on the label. Wash your skin once or twice a day with a gentle soap or acne wash. Try not to scrub or pick at your pimples. This can make them worse and can cause scars.

If you have just a few pimples to treat, you can get an acne cream without a prescription. Look for one that has benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid. These work best when used just the way the label says.

It can take time to get acne under control. Keep using the same treatment for 6 to 8 weeks. You may even notice that it gets worse before it gets better. If your skin is not better after 8 weeks, try another product.

If your pimples are really bothering you or are scarring your skin, see your doctor. A prescription gel or cream for your skin may be all you need. Your doctor may also order [antibiotic](#) pills. A mix of treatments may work best. If you are female, taking certain birth control pills may help.

If you have acne cysts, talk to your doctor about stronger medicine. Isotretinoin (such as Accutane) works very well, but it can cause birth defects. And using Accutane may be associated with depression. Let your doctor know if you have had depression before taking this medicine. And if you are female, you must protect against pregnancy by using two forms of birth control. Even one dose of this medicine can cause birth defects if a woman takes it while she is pregnant. You cannot take isotretinoin if you are breast-feeding.

## What can be done about acne scars?

There are skin treatments that can help acne scars look better and feel smoother. Ask your doctor about them. The best treatment for you depends on how severe the scarring is. You can have scar tissue removed or have a shot of collagen. Collagen smoothes a pitted scar by plumping up the skin underneath. You may get the best results with a combination of treatments.

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