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Acne

What is Acne? Acne is the term for plugged pores (blackheads and whiteheads), pimples, and even deeper lumps (cysts or nodules) that occur on the face, neck, chest, back, shoulders and even the upper arms. Acne affects most teenagers to some extent. However, the disease is not restricted to any age group; adults in their 20s - even into their 40s - can get acne. While acne usually clears up after several years even if untreated, you need not wait to outgrow it.

What causes acne? Rising hormone levels in males and females during adolescence (puberty) cause the oil (sebaceous) glands of the skin to get bigger. These glands are found in areas where acne is common (the face, upper back, and chest).

What does not cause acne? Acne is not caused by dirt or the foods you eat.

What can you do to improve your acne?

Wash your face with soap and warm water twice a day. Washing too often may actually make your acne worse. Regular shampooing is also recommended. If your hair is oily, you may want to wash it more often.

Men with acne who shave should try both an electric and a safety razor to see which is more comfortable. If you use a safety razor, soften your beard thoroughly with soap and warm water before applying shaving cream. To avoid nicking pimples, shave as lightly as possible. Shave only when necessary and always use a sharp blade.

Choose a sunscreen that is oil-free, such as a gel sunscreen.

If you wear a liquid foundation or use a moisturizer, look for ones that are oil-free and not just water-based. Choose products that are "non-comedogenic" (should not cause whiteheads or blackheads) or "non-acnegenic" (should not cause acne). Remove your cosmetics every night with soap and water.

Shield your face when applying hairsprays and gels. If the spray comes in contact with your facial skin, it can cause a cosmetic type of acne.

Your physician may open pimples or remove blackheads and whiteheads. Don't pick, scratch, pop or squeeze pimples yourself. When the pimples are squeezed, more redness, swelling, inflammation and scarring may result.

What can your doctor prescribe to help your acne? Control of acne is an ongoing process. All acne treatments work by preventing new acne. Existing blemishes must heal on their own. Improvement takes time. If your acne has not improved after 6 to 8 weeks, you may need a change in your treatment.

Vitamin A acid or benzoyl peroxide - Your dermatologist may prescribe topical creams or lotions such as vitamin A acid or benzoyl peroxide to help unblock the pores and reduce the bacteria. These may cause some drying and peeling. Your dermatologist will advise you on the correct use and how to handle side effects.

Topical Antibiotics - There are also antibiotics that are applied to the skin. These are used in less severe cases of acne.

Oral Antibiotics - Antibiotics taken by mouth such as tetracycline, minocycline or erythromycin are often prescribed for moderate or severe cases, especially when there is a lot of acne on the back or chest. The antibiotics reduce the bacteria in the follicle and may also decrease the redness directly. Some women develop a yeast infection in the vaginal area while taking oral antibiotics. If this occurs, continue your medicine and contact your dermatologist immediately for treatment of the yeast.

Birth Control Pills - Women who are taking birth control pills may notice a significant improvement in their acne, and occasionally birth control pills are used specifically for the treatment of acne. As with most medicines, check with your doctor about taking antibiotics if you are pregnant or nursing.

Other drugs - Isotretinoin is a vitamin A derivative that is sometimes used for severe acne that has not responded to other treatments. Patients using isotretinoin must thoroughly understand the side effects of this drug. Frequent follow-up visits are necessary to monitor side effects. Prevention of pregnancy is a must, since the drug causes severe birth defects if taken during pregnancy.

Proper care is necessary

No matter what special treatments your physician may use, remember that you must continue proper skin care until the tendency to have acne has passed. There is no instant or permanent cure for acne, but it is controllable and proper treatment may prevent scars.

For additional information or to make an appointment, contact us at 689-8139.