

Acne

Acne is due to an over-active oil glands and plugging of these oil glands. More than 90 percent of teenagers have some acne. The main cause of acne is increased levels of hormones during adolescence. Acne is not caused by diet. A person who has acne does not have to avoid eating fried foods, chocolate, or any other food (although there may be other health reasons not to). Acne is not caused by sexual activity. It is not caused by dirt nor by not washing your face often enough. The tops of blackheads are black because of the chemical reaction of the oil plug with the air. Acne usually lasts until age 20 or even longer. It is unusual for acne to leave any scars, and people worry needlessly about this. There is no magic medicine that will cure mild acne. However, good skin care can keep acne under control and at a mild level.

A. Basic treatment for all acne:

- Wash your skin twice a day. The most important time to wash is bedtime. Use a mild soap such as Dove soap or Cetaphil cleanser.
- Shampoo your hair daily. Long hair can make acne worse by rubbing against your skin.
- Avoid picking. Picking stops acne from healing.

B. Additional treatment for pimples:

Use Benzoyl peroxide 5% lotion or gel. This lotion helps to open pimples and unplug blackheads. It also kills bacteria. It is available without a prescription. Ask your pharmacist to recommend a brand (such as Oxy5®). ProActive® products contain the same basic ingredients, but have not proven better even though they're more expensive. Apply the lotion once a day at bedtime. Redheads and blondes should apply it only every other day for the first 2 weeks because it can be too irritating at first. An amount of lotion the size of a pea should be enough to cover most of your face. You may need to use these creams for several years. If your skin becomes red or peels, you are using too much of the medicine or are applying it too often. Try using less of it or applying it less often. You may also need to use Cetaphil moisturizer to soften the skin just before turning in for the night.

In general, it is better not to "pop" pimples, but most teenagers do it anyway. Therefore, do it safely. Never open a pimple before it has come to a head. Wash your face and hands first. Use a sterile needle (sterilized by alcohol or a flame). Nick the surface of the yellow pimple with the tip of the needle. The pus should run out without squeezing. Wipe away the pus and wash the area and your hands with soap and water. Scarring will not usually result from opening small pimples, but it can result from squeezing boils or other large, red, tender lumps. Sometimes these need an antibiotic prescription.

Blackheads are the plugs found in blocked-off oil glands. They should be treated with Benzoyl peroxide 5 percent lotion or gel. This lotion is also excellent for removing thickened skin that blocks the openings to oil glands. Use the lotion as described above for pimples. Blackheads that are a cosmetic problem can sometimes be removed with a blackhead extractor, but these are hard to find in stores. This method is much more efficient than anything you can do with your fingers. Soak your face with a warm washcloth before you try to remove blackheads. If the blackhead does not come out the first time, leave it alone.

C. Common mistakes in treating acne:

- Avoid scrubbing your skin. Hard scrubbing of the skin is harmful because it irritates the openings of the oil glands and can cause them to be more tightly closed.
- Avoid putting any oily or greasy substances on your face. Oily and greasy substances make acne worse by blocking oil glands. If you must use cover-up cosmetics, use water-based cosmetics and wash them off at bedtime.
- Avoid hair tonics or hair creams (especially greasy ones). When you sweat, these substances will spread to your face and aggravate the acne.

D. And finally....

If you have a significant problem with your acne, or a deeper infection sets up from your acne, please call us for an appointment at 943-7337. Good luck!