

ACNE

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

DESCRIPTION

A chronic inflammatory skin condition common in adolescence, but can occasionally occur throughout life. It is characterized by skin eruptions on the face, chest and back.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Blackheads (black spots the size of a pinhead).
Whiteheads (white spots similar to blackheads).
Pustules (small pus-filled lesions).
Redness and inflammation around eruptions.
If acne is severe, cysts (larger, firm swelling in the skin), and abscesses (swollen, inflamed, tender area of infection containing pus) may appear.

CAUSES

Oil glands in the skin become plugged for unknown reasons, but sex hormone changes during adolescence play a role. When oil backs up, the gland becomes infected by bacteria normally present on the skin.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress
- Oily skin
- Endocrine disorders
- Use of drugs, such as cortisone, male hormones, some oral contraceptives
- Family history of acne

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Most cases respond well to treatment. Despite good treatment, acne will flare up from time to time.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Poor self-image and psychological distress.
Facial scars or pitting of the skin.

GENERAL MEASURES

- Wash face with a mild soap once or twice a day and after exercising. Clean skin gently; don't scrub. An antibacterial soap may help. Rinse soap off completely.
- Shampoo hair daily, especially if it is oily. Don't let hair hang in the face. Use dandruff-preventing shampoo if needed.
- Avoid oil-based cosmetics. Use thinner, lotion-style water-based products.
- Don't squeeze, scratch, pick, or rub the skin. Acne heals better without damage to the skin. Removal of comedones (blackheads) may be done by your health care provider.
- Use nonprescription acne products on your skin.
- See your health care provider if home treatments are not helping or acne is more severe. A skin exam will be done and treatment options will be discussed.
- Treatment will depend on the severity of the acne, any infection or inflammation, and if you are a female who may become pregnant. Treatment may include drugs (both for topical use or taken by mouth).
- Cosmetic surgery (dermabrasion) may be recommended to remove scars after acne heals.
- Removal or drainage of a cyst may be needed.

MEDICATION

- Use nonprescription creams or lotions products to treat the acne. These may contain benzyl peroxide, sulfur, salicylic acid or resorcinol.
- Antibiotics may be prescribed for bacteria infection.
- For more severe cases, topical or oral retinoids (a form of vitamin A), hormone drugs, or stronger acne drugs may be prescribed. Some drugs may increase your sensitivity to sunlight and increase the risk of sunburn.
- Caution: If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, tell your health care provider before using acne drugs.

DIET

Food has not been proven to cause acne. Drink plenty of water.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- New, unexplained symptoms develop.
- Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.
- If an excessively large or painful lesion develops.
- Acne recurs despite treatment.

Student Health Center

WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

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618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.