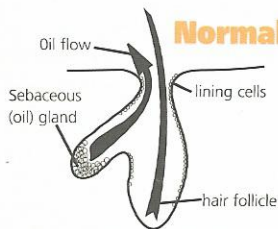


ACNE

Most teenagers will have a few blackheads and pimples, and some will have more severe and inflamed acne. As the body's hormone levels change, especially during adolescence, the hair follicles and oil (sebaceous) glands of the skin may be affected. This tends to be more apparent on the face, neck, chest and back. Although it is most common in teenagers, acne can occur at any age. In order to reduce the effects of acne, it is important to use a suitable cleansing and treatment routine.

How does acne occur?

Acne involves changes in the hair follicles on the skin.

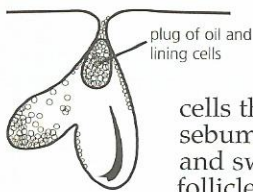


Normal follicle

When the cells that line the hair follicle are replaced, they are carried to the surface of the skin by sebum (oil).

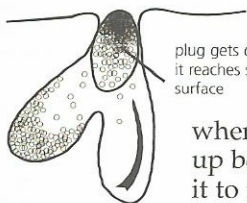
Whitehead

During puberty, changing hormone levels (especially the production of androgens) increase keratin and sebum production. Increased keratin makes the lining cells thicker. This and more sebum can lead to blockage and swelling of a hair follicle to form a comedone.



Comedones may be 'open' or 'closed'. A whitehead appears creamy white in colour and is known as a closed comedone as the plug is under the skin.

Blackhead

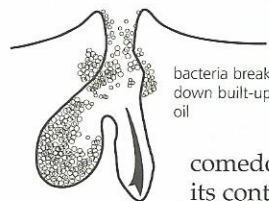


Whiteheads can become blackheads when enough sebum builds up behind the plug to push it to the skin surface, becoming an 'open' comedone. It darkens when exposed to light

due to the accumulation of the skin pigment melanin (not because of dirt).

Pimple

While more sebum is being produced, bacteria in the hair follicle multiply and break down the oil. This causes inflammation and small red,



raised bumps appear. The follicle may become red and full of pus, forming a pimple. In time the

comedone may burst, releasing its contents under the skin surface. Squeezing the skin at this stage may cause damage to the surrounding skin.

What makes acne worse

- Some skin care and hair care products increase the amount of oil on the skin and may block the hair follicle e.g. oil-based make-up, hair oils, sun tan oils, soap and liquid soap washes
- Working with oils and greases may also increase the amount of oil on the skin e.g. deep frying foods
- Some medicines – ask a pharmacist or doctor
- Scrubbing, scratching, squeezing or picking the skin
- Sweating a lot
- High humidity
- Hormonal changes e.g. prior to a period, thought to be due to changes in progesterone levels
- Stress, anxiety or illness.

There is no evidence that chocolate or fatty foods cause acne or make it worse.

Important

- Some acne preparations are only applied to the pimples and some to the whole area. Carefully read the instructions and check with a pharmacist or doctor if unsure.
- Some treatments need to be used for several months, and may take up to six weeks before a change is evident. Ask a pharmacist or doctor how long the treatment period is.
- Those who believe their acne is being caused by medications should see a doctor.

Treating acne

The aim of treatment is to remove the plugs, so that the sebum is able to flow freely, and to reduce the number of bacteria on the skin. Treatment should reduce comedone formation.

Regular cleansing of the skin morning and night, including after exercise, is vital to controlling the oiliness of the skin. Use a non-soap cleanser at all times. Some cleansers also contain antibacterial agents to reduce bacteria on the skin's surface.

Treatment for acne includes:

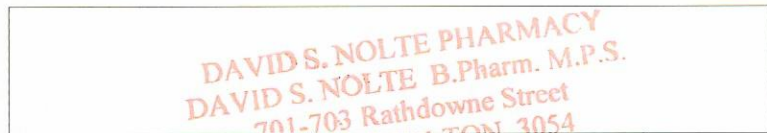
- Topical agents used to unblock the comedone (keratolytic medicines)
- Topical or oral agents to reduce the bacteria (antibacterial medicines)
- Medicines used to reduce the activity of the sebaceous gland
- Anti-inflammatory agents.

There are many products available to treat acne. They include:

- Creams and wipes containing sulfur or salicylic acid – to help stop hair follicles from becoming clogged, and to loosen blackheads and whiteheads
- Preparations containing benzoyl peroxide reduce oil on the surface of the skin by causing a light peeling. They are available from a pharmacy in both a wash and a gel of varying strengths.
- For more severe acne, a dermatologist may prescribe other medications such as topical retinoids or antibiotics or a dermatologist may prescribe other medications such as isotretinoin. These are to control the acne and assist to minimise scarring.

A pharmacist or doctor can recommend a care plan that is suitable for each skin type.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist



Pharmacy Self Care has a strong commitment to providing current and reliable health information.
The information in this card was current at time of printing.

- Tell a pharmacist or doctor if any acne treatment stings or irritates the skin when applied.
- See a doctor if over-the-counter acne treatments have been used for some time with no improvement.
- Some preparations may make the skin more sensitive to the sun. Use an oil-free, at least SPF 15+ sunscreen every day.
- Some medicines for acne should not be used during pregnancy or for a time prior to pregnancy. Check with a doctor or pharmacist.

Self care

- Gently cleanse the area affected by acne twice a day and after exercise. Use an antibacterial wash morning and night and a gentle soap substitute at other times. It is important to ensure that the non-soap cleanser selected does not block your pores. Pat dry with a soft towel.
- Do not pop, squeeze or pick at acne.
- Heavy oil-based facial products can make acne worse. Use water based make-up, moisturisers and sunscreen (ask pharmacy staff).
- Thoroughly remove make-up at the end of the day.
- Exercise regularly, eat a healthy diet with lots of fresh food and water. This will improve general health and be reflected in the condition of the skin.

More information about acne can be found at the following websites:

www.dermcoll.asn.au/acne.as (prepared by the Australasian College of Dermatologists)
www.skincarephysicians.com/acnetnet/ (prepared by the American Academy of Dermatology)

Other relevant fact cards:

- Nutrition series
- Sense in the Sun

Contact:

A doctor – listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the Yellow Pages

A Self Care pharmacy – to locate telephone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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