
Adult Acne

If your skin is erupting with blemishes that you thought could only affect a teenager, you may have adult acne. This is acne in people over the age of 25. Acne in teenagers is more common in teen boys. Acne in adults is more common in women.

Acne is the term for clogged pores. Pores are tiny openings on the skin that may become inflamed and form blemishes. Adult acne blemishes show up mainly on the face. In women, blemishes tend to show up around the chin, mouth, jawline, and neck. In men, acne often affects the entire face. But the trunk and upper arms can also have acne.

Acne can be treated. Treatments can also decrease the scarring and changes to skin color caused by acne.

What causes acne?

Male hormones (androgens) may cause acne in some people. For example, this may happen in people with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). Acne in women often may happen just before their menstrual periods, from menopause, or when starting or stopping birth control pills. Stress may cause some acne flare-ups. Some hair and skin care products can cause acne. You may be at more risk for adult acne if you had acne when you were a teenager or if others in your family have had acne.

Types of acne

Acne happens when certain hair follicles are damaged. One or more of 4 things happen:

- The hair follicle is blocked by dead cells and oil (sebum)
- The follicle makes more oil (sebum) than normal
- Bacteria (*P. acnes*) grow in the follicle
- The follicle becomes irritated (inflamed)

Four types of blemishes can appear:

- **Whiteheads** are round, white blemishes that form when hair follicles become clogged.
- **Blackheads** are round, dark blemishes that form when whiteheads reach the skin's surface and touch air.
- **Pimples** are red, swollen bumps that form when plugged follicle walls break near the skin's surface.
- **Deep cysts** are pus-filled pimples. They form when plugged follicle walls break deep within the skin. Acne cysts are often large and painful. In some cases, they also cause scars.

How treatment can help

The goals of treatment are to keep new acne blemishes from forming and to prevent scarring and changes in skin color. You will usually need a combination of treatments. You may need to use a treatment for at least 2 months to see if it works. This is because acne lesions take at least 8 weeks to develop.



Your treatment will depend on how serious your acne is. You and your healthcare provider can discuss the best way to treat and control it. In most cases, acne treatment includes:

- Good skin care that doesn't damage or irritate skin
- Medicines put on the skin (topical)
- Antibiotics, hormones, or both

Often you will need to take several medicines at first. For some treatments, women must use a birth control method so they won't get pregnant while being treated.

Your healthcare provider may also remove blemishes or give you injections. If you have acne scars, you may need surgery or medicines to help improve the way your skin looks. Be sure you understand your treatment plan and any side effects it might cause. You will play an important role in the success of your treatment.