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ACNE

Acne is the most common skin problem that young people have. Almost everyone will develop acne to some degree, but some people have more pimples than others. Acne is not a skin problem that is treated quickly and then never comes back again. It requires time, patience, and understanding on your part.

WHAT CAUSES ACNE?

The exact cause of acne is unknown. It is usually the result of several factors combined:

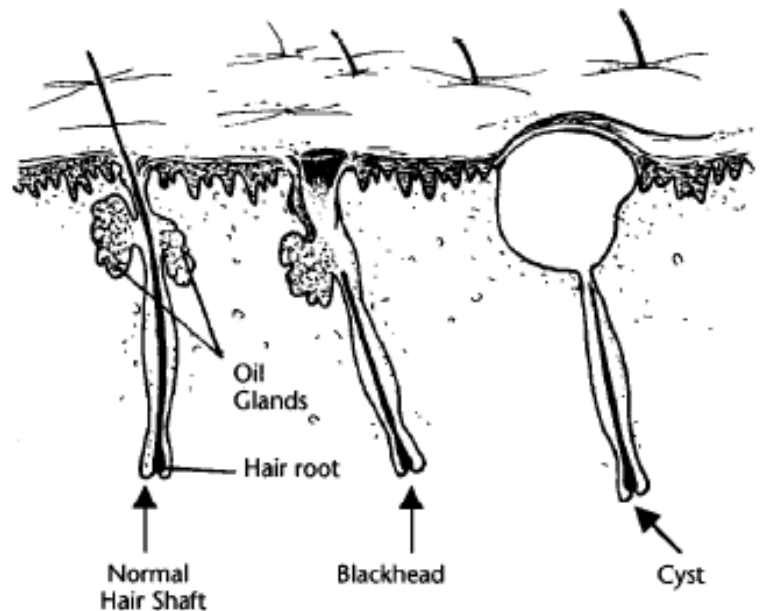
- Heredity may have a lot to do with whether or not you have acne.
- The increase in hormones during puberty seems to be a major factor. These hormones can cause oil glands to become more active. You may have noticed oily skin just before your acne began. The oil does not cause the acne; it is just a sign that acne may get worse.
- Acne is **not** caused by eating fried foods or chocolate.

WHAT IS A PIMPLE?

A pimple starts when a pore (an opening in the skin) gets plugged up. The pore has a tiny hair in it and oil glands at its base (Picture 1). The cells which line the pores are so small that they can only be seen with a microscope. During adolescence these cells are shed quickly. In some people the cells and oil stick together and form sebum which plugs the pore. If the pore is open, the result is a *blackhead*. If the pore is closed, a *whitehead* is formed.

The whitehead is the beginning of a pimple. It forms when the sebum escapes from the pore wall and gets under the skin. The body tries to clean out the sebum and brings in the white blood cells to do the work. The result is a *pimple*. When the sebum gets deeper under the skin, a *cyst* can form. A cyst is a deep and uncomfortable swelling of the skin.

Unless they are squeezed, blackheads do not usually cause pimples. Blackheads are not black from dirt, but from certain skin pigments (coloring) in the cells of the pores.



Picture 1 Pores inside your skin.

WHAT MAKES ACNE WORSE?

- If you scrub with an abrasive soap or pick at your skin or rub it too much, the walls of the pores may break and cause more pimples. Squeezing or popping blackheads and whiteheads usually causes more problems, including scars. Too much washing (more than 2 or 3 times a day) can make your skin dry and cause the oil glands to work harder.
- Foods like chocolate, sweets, colas, and fried foods do not make acne worse. But if a certain food does seem to make acne worse, try eliminating it for a few weeks and see if that helps.
- Some types of makeup may block pores; a water-based, oil-free makeup is best.
- Moisturizers containing oil may also make acne worse. Avoid oil-based moisturizers and cocoa butter. Also, do not use Noxzema®, Pond's Cold Cream®, or other greasy makeup removers.

TREATMENT FOR ACNE

Medicines used to treat acne work better for some people than others. Your doctor can tell you which medicine is best for you. **You** will need to tell us how it is working. Medicated lotions that are put on the skin are used the most. The doctor will tell you how often to use the medicines. Start out gradually, once or twice a day. Sometimes the medicine can make your skin red and dry.

How to Use the Lotions or Gels

1. First, wash your skin with your hands using a soap recommended by your doctor.
2. Rinse with water. Dry your face gently with a clean towel.
3. Apply a thin film of medicine and rub it in **gently**.
4. Keep the medicine away from your eyes and the corners of your mouth.

It usually takes from 2 to 3 weeks before your skin adjusts to the medicine. Sometimes it is even longer (4 to 6 weeks) before you can see real improvement. At first you may notice more whiteheads and your skin may actually seem worse for a time. Try to be patient. Don't give up!



Picture 2 Wash your face gently 2 times a day.

The doctor may prescribe an antibiotic for you to take by mouth. Be sure to read the special instructions and warnings on the medicine's label. Let your doctor know if you're taking any other medicines including birth control pills, antihistamines, asthma medicines, and vitamins. Also, let your doctor know if you may be pregnant or are planning a pregnancy.

OTHER TIPS AND ADVICE

- Try to be positive and not get discouraged. With proper treatment you can get your acne under control. Be patient -- it doesn't happen overnight.
- Pay special attention to hygiene. Wash your face gently 2 times a day with a mild soap (Picture 2). Do not use soaps that contain creams or perfumes. Do not use cleansing grains or abrasive pads.
- Shampoo your hair regularly (3 to 5 times a week). Style it away from your face and forehead. Do not use a lot of mousse, gel, or hairsprays near your hairline.
- **Never squeeze pimples.** Squeezing may produce scar tissue.
- Follow your doctor's instructions carefully.
- It is important to keep your follow-up appointments. Your medicines may need to be adjusted or changed from time to time.
- Tell your doctor if your skin becomes extremely dry or irritated, or if the medicine doesn't seem to be helping.

If you have any questions, be sure ask your doctor or nurse, or call _____.