

Acne

Hair follicles (the tiny pouches from which hairs grow) can become inflamed, especially on the face, chest, and back. This inflammation is called **acne**. Acne affects many individuals, especially in the teen years, but can last well into adulthood. Acne forms when the hair follicle produces excess oil, when the follicles are irritated (often from extra dead skin cells within the follicle), and when plugging of the **pore** (opening of the follicle) leads to increased bacteria in the follicle. Many treatments are available for acne and some may be used together. **Dermatologists** (doctors with specialized training in disorders of the skin) may offer advanced treatments to persons who have severe forms of acne or who have developed scars from their acne. The August 11, 2004, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about treatment of acne.

TYPES OF ACNE

- Mild acne—this includes **whiteheads** (closed clogged pores) and **blackheads** (clogged pores that are open at the skin surface).
- Moderate or severe inflammatory acne includes whiteheads and blackheads plus **papules** (reddened areas that are raised above the surface of the skin) and areas of **pustules** (pimples—small bumps on the skin that contain pus).
- Nodular acne—**nodules** are deeply embedded solid, often painful lesions. They may develop additional infection and may lead to scarring if not treated.

WHAT CAN MAKE ACNE WORSE?

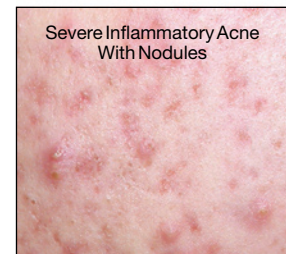
- Hormonal changes associated with puberty, menstruation, or menopause
- Picking at or squeezing acne lesions
- Friction, rubbing, or pressure (from tight clothing, sports gear, or harsh scrubbing of the skin)
- Some medications (such as corticosteroids, androgenic steroids, and lithium)

Acne is not caused by dirt or by eating particular foods such as chocolate. **Heredity** (biological family history) may play a role in developing acne.

TREATMENT

Routine hygiene should not be considered as treatment for acne. Appropriate treatment for acne is designed to minimize inflammation and prevent scarring. Keeping the face (or other areas affected by acne) clean is important, but harsh scrubbing should be avoided. Gentle cleansers and warm water are recommended for most effective removal of excess skin oils, bacteria, and dead skin cells. Picking at acne lesions can be harmful. Greasy cosmetic products, sprays, and other irritants should not be used because they may worsen acne.

Over-the-counter **topical** (applied to the skin) treatments may include products with salicylic acid, resorcinol, benzoyl peroxide, or lactic acid. Prescription medications to help acne may include stronger topical medications, antibiotics, products that contain isotretinoin (for more severe forms of acne), and oral contraceptives for women.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Dermatology
888/462-3376
www.aad.org
- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases
877/22-NIAMS
www.niams.nih.gov

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Sources: American Academy of Dermatology, National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

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