

Acne (spots)

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from acne (spots). It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Useful facts

What is acne?

Acne tends to start at puberty and leads to greasy skin and 'spots'. People may feel bad about themselves because of the way their skin looks, often at a time when they are already vulnerable.

How common is acne?

You are not alone – acne affects 8 out of 10 teenagers to some degree, and more frequently boys. Around one in three teenagers have acne bad enough to need treatment. In women and girls, acne is more common around the time of their monthly periods.

What causes it?

Acne is caused by inflamed skin glands on your face and upper trunk, often made worse by bacteria in the skin. In rare cases, acne may be caused by an underlying medical condition, such as polycystic ovary disease (PCO) or other hormonal disorders. It's a myth that stress or certain foods (such as chocolate) cause acne – and acne is certainly not due to a lack of cleanliness!

What can I expect to happen?

Duration

Acne is a long-term condition that may need immediate treatment for treating severely affected skin, and maintenance therapy to keep spots from recurring. In seven out of ten people, acne stops within five years – but some people experience skin problems lasting into their 20s and, rarely, longer.

Severity

Acne can vary from being mild and localised to severe and widespread.

Impact on your life

Acne can severely affect people's quality of life, regardless of how bad it is.

Tests

You won't need any tests unless your doctor suspects an underlying medical cause.

What can I do to get myself better - now and in the future?

Washing

Wash your face only once or twice a day with lukewarm water. Avoid strong or abrasive soaps and excessive scrubbing. Be aware that hot water and rough flannels can make symptoms worse rather than better.

Avoid squeezing

No matter how tempting, try not to squeeze acne spots, as this may cause scarring.

Over the counter creams, gels and lotions

Effective treatments are available to reduce and improve spots. They can also prevent or reduce scarring if started early. Ask a member of your pharmacy team for advice on available preparations.

Make-Up & Skincare

When choosing make-up and sunscreens, choose "non-comedogenic" (should not cause blackheads or whiteheads) or 'non-acnegenic' (should not cause acne) and always remove make up at the end of the day. Make-up experts, including pharmacists, can help advise.

When should I seek medical help?

Seek advice from a member of your pharmacy team or surgery if initial treatment with over the counter preparations doesn't work for you, if acne significantly impairs your quality of life, or if any of the following symptoms are present:

Severity

Your acne is really bad and you feel physically unwell because of it.

Pain

You develop painful spots that feel 'deep' in your skin.

Distress

You get distressed by your acne, and/or it affects your social life.

Scarring

You notice the beginning of scarring despite treatment.

Possible underlying medical causes

You suspect that you may have an underlying medical condition that causes your acne – for example, if you have additional symptoms such as infrequent or absent periods, excessive hair growth, or hair loss.

Acne fulminans

Seek help from a health professional if you experience fever and joint stiffness associated with acne.

Where can I find out more?

A member of your pharmacy team can help you to assess your symptoms and provide advice on suitable treatment options.

You can also seek information from the following websites:

- <https://www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/acne/>
- <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/conditions/acne>
- <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/skin-hair-and-nails/acne>
- <https://111.wales.nhs.uk/Acne/#Overview>

Coronavirus

It is still important to be mindful about coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, which are the same for adults and children and can include : a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste, feeling tired, shortness of breath, headache, sore throat, diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick, aching muscles, a blocked or runny nose. These are similar to symptoms of illness such as colds and flu.

You should consult the advice specific to your area in the UK (see links below).

If you are in a high risk group, it is important that you read the appropriate sections and make contact with the recommended agencies if you have symptoms or queries.

For a general advice on what to do if you have symptoms, testing and vaccination information, please visit:

- NHS England: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Northern Ireland NIDirect: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>
- NHS Inform for Scotland: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>
- NHS Wales 111: [https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/c/article/coronavirus\(covid19\)/](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/c/article/coronavirus(covid19)/)