Acne

What is acne?

- Acne occurs when the pores of the skin become clogged with oil.
- Bacteria become trapped in the pore and irritate the skin and hair follicle.
- The irritation around the plugged pore and hair follicle forms a red bump called acne.
- A black plug, or blackhead, is formed when the dead skin comes to the surface.

Who gets acne?

- Acne affects almost all teens.
- It begins around puberty when the body produces more hormones called androgens, which make the oil glands produce more oil.

Are there degrees of acne?

- Acne can range from mild to severe.
- When severe, it often results in scarring.
- Squeezing or popping pimples forces the oil and bacteria into deeper layers of skin and can cause cystic acne and scarring.

What contributes to acne?

- Changes in hormone levels
- Family history
- Hot, humid climate
- Oily makeup
- Rubbing and irritating the skin
- Stress

What helps to reduce acne?

- Having a healthy diet and regular exercise helps overall skin health. Specific foods, such as fatty foods and chocolate, probably do not make acne worse.
- Touching or squeezing blemishes can increase redness and scarring and should be avoided.
- Using skin care products labeled "nonacnegenic," "noncomedogenic," "oil free," or "will not clog pores" can help.
- Rubbing alcohol will not help acne and may cause irritation.
- Keeping hair off the forehead makes your skin less oily.
- Keeping hands and telephone off of the face reduces acne.

How is acne treated?

- Use a mild soap and wash the skin gently. Frequent or hard washing will damage the skin and cause more inflammation.
- Medicine can be bought without a prescription (2.5–10% benzoyl peroxide) and applied to the skin (topically).
- Acne medicines should be applied to the entire area where the break-out occurs, not just on the individual blemishes.
- If this does not work, a doctor can be contacted.
- There are many medications for acne, including antibiotics and some birth control pills, that require a prescription from your doctor.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American Academy of Dermatology
Telephone: (847) 240-1289 or (866) 503-SKIN (7546)
Web: www.aad.org

American Academy of Family Physicians
Telephone: (913) 906-6000 or (800) 274-2237
Web: www.aafp.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
Telephone: (847) 434-4000
Web: www.aap.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
(202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444
Web: www.acog.org

American Medical Association
Telephone: (800) 621-8335
Web: www.ama-assn.org

AWARE Foundation
Telephone: (215) 955-9847
Web: www.awarefoundation.org

girlshealth.gov
Web: www.4girls.gov/

Go Ask Alice!
Telephone: (212) 854-5453
Web: www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

National Women's Health Information Center
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Telephone: (800) 994-9662
Web: www.4woman.org

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