

Acne

Acne is a very common skin condition that causes pimples. It develops when the pores (tiny holes in the skin) become blocked, allowing oil and bacteria to build up. This leads to the appearance of red spots, whiteheads, blackheads or lumps under the skin (cysts). Acne is most common in teenagers but can affect people of all ages. It also tends to run in some families.



Acne before treatment

Treatment

Controlling acne is an ongoing process and can take time. Your dermatologist will talk to you about the treatment options available and the most suitable ones for you. Treatment is important because it can reduce the chances of scarring and skin discolouration. When the skin clears, your dermatologist may recommend continued treatment to prevent new breakouts.

Your dermatologist may recommend:

- Topical (applied to the skin) creams and lotions: these can help to unblock the pores and reduce the bacteria on the skin.
- Oral (taken by mouth) antibiotics: these may reduce the growth of bacteria on the skin.
- Hormonal medications: the contraceptive pill and other hormone treatments may be used to treat acne in some women.
- Oral retinoids/vitamin A: these medications are very effective for the treatment of acne; they reduce the blockage of pores on the skin, making it more difficult for spots and infections to occur. They can only be prescribed by dermatologists.
- Broadband light therapy (BBL): this technique uses pulses of light to attack the bacteria on the skin. Each treatment lasts for 20 to 30 minutes and is usually given once a week for several weeks.

What causes acne?

Acne develops when the pores in your skin become blocked. These pores normally help your body to shed dead skin cells, but hormonal changes can cause the body to make too much oil (called sebum), which causes the dead skin cells to clump together and form a plug inside the pore. This means that the dead skin cells cannot rise to the surface of the skin. Bacteria that normally lives on the skin surface get into the clogged pore and multiply quickly. The bacteria causes inflammation in the skin, and acne spots or cysts can then form.

Acne may be aggravated by stress, oil from the scalp and certain medications. Some face moisturisers and oil-based make-up can make acne worse. Humid weather may also aggravate acne.

The role of diet in people with acne remains controversial. Acne is not caused by eating chocolate or greasy foods, but studies have linked diets that are high in sugar or dairy products with outbreaks of acne.

How is acne diagnosed?

Your dermatologist can diagnose acne based on the appearance of the spots. They may grade your acne from mild to severe.

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What can I do to avoid flare ups?

The following strategies may help to reduce your acne:

- Wash your face and affected areas twice a day, plus after sport or sweating.
- Be gentle with your skin: apply gentle cleansers to the skin using your fingers rather than a cloth, and do not use scented or perfumed products, or products that contain alcohol on your skin.
- Rinse your skin with lukewarm water and let it dry naturally.
- Avoid scrubbing your skin.
- Avoid prolonged sun exposure, especially if you are taking certain medications that make you skin more sensitive to sunlight.



After acne treatment

What else can I do about acne?

Acne is not contagious or life threatening, but it can be very upsetting and may affect how you feel about yourself. Some people with acne develop low self-esteem or depression.

Speak to your SouthDerm Dermatologist today about what is available for you and your skin condition.