

## Acne

Acne, particularly acne vulgaris, is the most frequently encountered skin disorder in the teenage and young adult population. Girls tend to suffer earlier in life but boys tend to have more severe acne. In most cases acne resolves before the age of 30.

Acne is a disorder of the skin's sebaceous follicles and is associated with the extra greasiness of the skin due to hormonal changes at puberty. Areas typically affected are the face, neck and shoulders, where the greatest number of oil-producing skin glands occur. Increased sebum production and occlusion of the follicular openings in the skin result in the formation of comedones (white and black heads). Micro-organisms in the skin then break down the excess sebum into fatty acids which cause inflammation and irritation.

Treatments for acne help by preventing the cause of the conditions (antibacterials) or by alleviating symptoms (anti-inflammatory), and for mild to moderate acne are usually topical. However, systemic antibiotics may be prescribed for moderate to severe acne.

Topical treatments fall into two main categories – Keratolytics and antibacterials. Keratolytics like benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, resorcinol and sulphur are abrasives and act upon keratin in the skin to break open blocked follicles and generally increase the skin's turnover rate. Antibacterials, such as benzoyl peroxide and triclosan, are used to reduce the number of bacteria on the skin and prevent re-infection. A new treatment, nicotinamide, is now available as a topical preparation and is indicated for mild to moderate acne. Cleansing agents (detergents and alcohol) help remove excessive sebum and loose cells from the skin's surface and so help prevent the formation of spots.

Hygiene is important. Simple washing with soap and water – an antibacterial soap is preferable - will help manage the condition. Drying vigorously with a rough towel removes oil and helps break up any blackheads. The use of lots of greasy makeup should be avoided as it may make the condition worse.

Any acne treatments will take weeks, if not a couple of months, to produce any real effect. Customers should be warned not to expect instant results. If the condition does not improve within a couple of months, antibiotics may be necessary. Occurring, as it does during teenage years, when self-confidence is important, acne needs to be approached with tact.