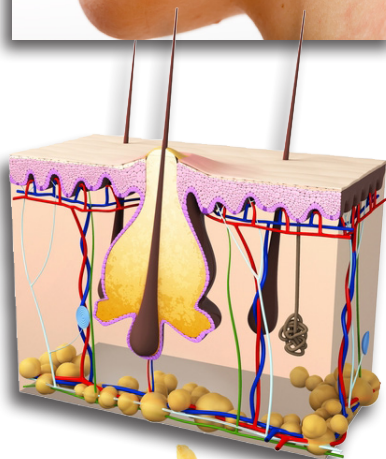


# ACNE: get rid of THOSE PIMPLES!

we are here to help you

by Monica Hamburg, MD



Acne, which may be considered just a nuisance to some, can greatly affect your adolescent's self-esteem. In fact, what we as adults may consider a mild case of acne, can be devastating to a teenager's mental health, and concerns should be taken seriously. Further, severe acne can lead to permanent scarring so treatment steps should be taken early to prevent long-term effects. The doctors at Clarkstown Pediatrics are able to treat many of our patients with acne without the need for a dermatology referral. We should be able to **clear** most teenagers from acne if they keep using their medications consistently!

Acne is caused by a combination of factors, including colonization of the skin with a bacteria called *P. acnes* and the effect of pubertal hormones on skin glands. Hence, acne usually occurs during adolescence, although it is quite common in children as young as 9 years old. These changes lead to plugged follicles called *blackheads* and *whiteheads*. If bacteria builds up in these follicles, then a pimple, pustule, or cyst may develop.

## But I wash my face a million times a day!

One myth about acne is that washing your face well can prevent it. On the contrary, vigorous or abrasive cleansing disrupts the skin's natural barriers and natural flora and can actually worsen acne! While daily facial cleansing with a gentle soap-free pH-balanced cleanser is recommended (*Dove, Cetaphil, etc.*) vigorous cleansing is harmful. Another myth is that make-up worsens acne. On the contrary, an *oil-free non-comedogenic* makeup does not worsen acne and will improve your adolescent's quality of life by concealing acne lesions. *Non-comedogenic* sunscreen is available as well (*Nutragen, etc.*)

## It must be those french fries!

Foods have **not** been shown to worsen acne. While we do not encourage lots of chocolate or french fries, the myth that they worsen acne is untrue.

## I love to pop the pimples!

Please don't pop those pimples! This will spread bacteria and worsen inflammation. Over time, "pimple popping" can increase the risk of permanent facial scars.

## How should I start?

Many over-the-counter products are available for acne and some are quite effective, especially for mild acne. *Benzoyl peroxide* is one of the most effective treatments, available as creams or washes, and little resistance to *Benzoyl peroxide* occurs. One common side effect of *Benzoyl peroxide* is dryness and irritation of the skin. It can

actually seem like the acne is getting worse! But this usually occurs in the beginning of treatment and gets better after a couple weeks of treatment, so if you can encourage your teenager to push through, you should start to see some improvement after a few weeks.

Generally we recommend all of our patients begin with benzoyl peroxide. There appears to be little added benefit to strengths more than 5%. While there is nothing wrong with *Proactiv*, it is really just very expensive *Benzoyl peroxide*, so we tend to steer our patients to more cost effective products.

### **I THINK I NEED SOMETHING STRONGER, PLEASE HELP!**

There are many prescription acne treatments that we can discuss with you if the OTC options aren't helping or if your child has more severe acne. These include topical *retinoids*, topical *antibiotics*, topical combination products, and oral antibiotics:

If acne is not clearing we will usually add a retinoid (most commonly *Retin-A*, *Adapalene* such as *Differin*, *Epiduo*, or *Tazorac*). Do not overapply as it may cause dryness of the face.

If further control is needed, the addition of a topical antibiotic is recommended. *Clindamycin* washes are the most effective. Some preparations mix the antibiotic with *benzoyl peroxide* for convenience. (*Benzaclin*, *Duac*).

### **WHEN SHOULD I SEE A SKIN DOCTOR?**

There will be some who still are not responding and we may recommend an oral antibiotic such as *Doxycycline*. At this point, we generally feel that a referral to a dermatologist is helpful.

The strongest acne treatment is available by prescription from a dermatologist only, oral *Isotretinoin* (*Accutane*). It is reserved for severe acne, and needs to be monitored closely for possible side effects.

But no matter what treatment you are using, keep it up! Many of these treatments will show gradual improvement over a month, and may need 3 months to really clear things.

### **WHAT ABOUT "BACNE"?**

Many teenagers have their worst acne on their shoulders or backs. The slang term "*bacne*" reminds us how common it is. All of the same treatments used for facial acne can and should be used on the back as well. Some may be able to reach these areas using a mirror. If unreachable ask a family member or friend to help.

### **DO ALL TEENAGERS JUST HAVE TO SUFFER WITH PIMPLES?**

No, we will help you clear them. Let's get started!

## **THREE TYPES OF TOPICAL MEDICATIONS:**

**1. Benzoyl peroxide**

**2. Retinoids**

**3. Antibiotics**



**Clarkstown Parentletter** Douglas Puder, MD,FAAP, Editor,Illustrator  
Monica Hamburg, MD, FAAP, Asst Editor Jeffrey Karasik,MD,FAAP Gregg Rockower, MD, FAAP

We hope you find our Parentletter helpful and informative. Please keep in mind that receipt of this newsletter does not create a doctor/patient relationship and that it is not meant to serve as a substitute for professional medical advice. For particular pediatric medical concerns, including decisions about diagnoses, medications and other treatments, or if you have any questions after reading this newsletter, we encourage you to speak with your child's pediatrician.