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Acne Patient Education

What is Acne?

Acne is a skin condition that occurs when the oil secreting glands in the skin are clogged and become inflamed and infected. Acne occurs in 90% of teenagers.

How does Acne Occur?

Acne is caused by inflammation of the skin and also at the base of the strands of the hair. During teenage years, hormones stimulate the growth of body hair and the oil glands secrete more oil. The skin pores become clogged. Bacteria grows in these clogged pores and when the body works to kill the bacteria, inflammation occurs resulting in black heads and white heads forming in these areas.

What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms include whiteheads, blackheads and pimples, some of which are filled with pus. These skin eruptions may be painful. In severe cases, cysts which are fluid filled bumps, larger than pimples may develop under the skin.

How is it treated?

Treatment is cleaning of the pores, keeping oil and dirt out of the pores and reducing inflammation. At first your doctor will talk about how you are currently taking care of your skin. You and your doctor will discuss which products you should continue to use and which you should stop using. Several products may be used to prevent pimples or blackheads. Treatment usually begins with topical products containing Benzoyl Peroxide, often combined with topical antibiotic on the areas of the skin with acne. Sometimes, a skin cream or gel containing Retin-A is also used. If the topical treatments alone are not effective, you may also be put on an oral antibiotic. An oral medication called Acutane (Isotretinoin) is available for severe cystic acne, however, it is generally used only by a dermatologist.

How long with the effects last?

New whiteheads usually stop appearing after four to six weeks of treatment but treatment usually needs to be continued for at least six to eight weeks. If you are taking oral antibiotics at some point, we will decrease the dose or have you stop taking them to see if they are still necessary. Many factors may make acne worsen temporarily. For example, girls may notice acne gets worse before their menstrual period. Therefore, even if you are receiving proper treatment, results may vary from time to time. Try to notice the changes in your skin and when possible, what factors in your life seem to make the acne worse. Often times, emotional stress will worsen acne.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the treatment prescribed by your doctor. In addition, you can use the following suggestions:
Don't squeeze, pick, scratch or rub your skin. Scars may form if you squeeze your pimples.
Don't rest your face on your hands when you read, study or watch TV.
Pull your hair away from your face when you sleep. Style it away from your face during the day.
Avoid getting sunburn.
Get physical exercise regularly.
Keep follow up appointments with your doctor and keep a record of what has been tried and how it worked.

There are many alternatives to try, so don't give up!