Acne

Acne is a common skin problem. Up to eighty percent of people get acne at some time, especially from ages 12 to 24. Acne occurs when oil glands get blocked, become red (*inflamed*) or infected.

CAUSES

Hair follicles have glands that make an oily material called sebum. Acne happens when these glands get plugged with sebum and skin cells. Germs (*bacteria*) that are normally found in the oil glands can multiply. This can cause the glands to be inflamed or infected.

The main cause of acne is the change in hormones during adolescence. This causes the oil glands to get bigger and to make more sebum.

Other causes or things that can make acne worse include:

- Hormone changes with women's menstrual cycles.
- Oil based cosmetics and hair products.
- Harshly scrubbing the skin.
- Strong soaps or astringents.
- Stress.
- Heredity.
- Hormone problems due to certain diseases.
- Long or oily hair rubbing against the skin.
- Some medicines.
- Pressure from headbands, backpacks, shoulder pads, etc.
- Jobs that have exposure to certain oils and chemicals.

SYMPTOMS

Acne causes different types of problems with the oil glands. There are concentrations of these glands found on the face, neck, chest and upper back. Acne often occurs at these places. Acne often leads to:

- Red pimples.
- Whiteheads.
- Blackheads.
- Small pus filled pimples (*pustules*).
- Bigger red pimples or pustules that cause tenderness.

More severe acne can cause:

- Boils.
- Fluid filled swellings (*cysts*).
- Scars.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Acne usually disappears with time. Good skin care is the most important part of treatment:

- Wash the skin gently at least twice a day and after exercise. Always wash your skin before bed.
- Use mild soap.
- Follow each wash with a non-oil based skin moisturizer. (Especially if you have dry skin).
- Keep hair clean and off the face. Shampoo daily.
- Only use treatments prescribed by your caregiver.
- Use a good sun block (SPF over 15). This is especially important if you use some acne medicines.
- Be patient with treatments. It can take 2 months before acne gets better.
- Use cosmetics that say that they are *noncomedogenic*. This means that they do not plug the oil glands.
- Avoid things that make acne worse:

- Leaning your chin or forehead on your hands.
- Picking or squeezing pimples.

TREATMENT

There are many good treatments for acne. Some are over-the-counter and some prescribed. Treatment depends on:

- The type of acne (red pimples, whiteheads, etc.).
- How severe the acne is.

Common treatments include:

- Creams and lotions that:
  - Prevent clogging of oil glands.
  - Treat or prevent infection and inflammation.
- Antibiotics, put on the skin or taken as a pill.
- Pills that decrease sebum production.
- Birth control pills.
- Special lights or lasers.
- Minor surgery.
- Injection of medicine into acne areas.
- Chemicals that cause peeling of the skin.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Acne is not better in 8 weeks.
- Acne is worse.
- A larger area of skin that is red or tender (may mean infection).

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