



## All About Acne

### What is Acne?

Acne is a common skin condition. It is irritation of the skin resulting in pimples (zits), cysts, blackheads, and/or whiteheads.



Blackhead



Whitehead



Pimples (Zits)



Cystic Acne

### What causes acne?

- Hair follicles are small openings all over the skin that hair grows out of. They make an oil, called sebum, to keep hair and skin healthy. If too much sebum is made, it can clog the hair follicles.
- If bacteria get trapped in the hair follicle it can result in red, irritated, and painful acne.

### How is acne diagnosed?

- Acne is diagnosed by looking carefully at the skin, no special tests are needed.
- A diagnosis from a healthcare professional is not necessary before starting home therapies.
- If your acne does not respond to home therapies, is severe, or you are unsure of the diagnosis you should see a healthcare professional.

### **Why do I have acne on other parts of my body?**

- Hair follicles are all over the body so acne can happen anywhere on the body
- The most common places acne is found include the face, back, shoulders, and chest

### **Does having acne mean I have something wrong with me?**

- Acne is common when going through puberty (when your body begins to show physical changes from childhood to being an adult): over 85% of teenagers battle acne at some point.
- Acne can sometimes be hard to deal with and you may feel self-conscious or embarrassed. This is something you should talk to your healthcare provider about.
- Acne can be associated with some other conditions, such as Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), but having acne does not mean you necessarily have those conditions.

### **What can make my acne worse?**

- Touching your face
- Picking at/squeezing pimples
- Not washing your face regularly
- Not washing your hair when it is oily
- Scrubbing your skin with harsh items or chemicals
- Some people notice their acne is worse with their periods or if they are stressed out
- Some people believe their acne gets worse with certain foods, but please talk to your healthcare professional before cutting out any food groups.

### **Is there anything I can do at home or buy over the counter to help?**

- Washing your face with lukewarm water twice a day is really important. Also wash your face after you play sports or participate in activities that make you sweaty.
- It is best to just use your fingertips when washing your face, but if you need one, have a washcloth that is just for your face that you do not use on other parts of your body.
- Avoid scrubbing your face with a washcloth or towel as this will irritate your skin.
- Avoid any cleansers that ‘scrub’ the skin or exfoliate as this will irritate the skin.
- Using a gentle, unscented, oil-free cleanser designed just for the face is sometimes enough to keep acne under control.
- Always moisturize your face with an unscented facial moisturizer after washing once your face is dry.
- Your makeup and any products you put on your face should be “non-comedogenic” which means that they won’t make your acne worse.
- Avoid facials or things that squeeze out pimples or pores. This may make your acne worse and irritate your skin.
- Check out the “Acne Treatments” handout for more suggestions.

### **Acne Myths**

- Stress doesn’t cause acne, but for some people it can make it worse.
- Having acne doesn’t mean you’re ‘dirty’.
- Specific foods don’t cause acne though some might make it worse.

### **When should I go to the doctor?**

- If your acne is not improving after 6-8 weeks of over-the-counter treatment, or is causing you pain/embarrassment, you may want to speak to your doctor about medicines that could help.
- They may start you on prescription medicines or send you to a specialist skin doctor called a Dermatologist.

*This document was created and approved by the NASPAG Education Committee November 2023*