

Acne is a common skin condition that affects most people at some point. It causes spots, oily skin and sometimes skin that's hot or painful to touch.

Acne most commonly develops on the:

There are 6 main types of spot caused by acne:

Although acne can't be cured, it can be controlled with treatment. Several creams, lotions and gels for treating spots are available at pharmacies. If you develop acne, it's a good idea to speak to your pharmacist for advice.

If you have acne you can get advice and treatment directly from a pharmacy. Find your local pharmacy on Scotland's Service Directory.

Acne is most commonly linked to the changes in hormone levels during puberty, but can start at any age.

This abnormal sebum changes the activity of a usually harmless skin bacterium called *P. acnes*, which becomes more aggressive and causes inflammation and pus.

Acne is known to run in families. If both your mother and father had acne, it's likely that you'll also have acne.

Hormonal changes, such as those that occur during the menstrual cycle or pregnancy, can also lead to episodes of acne in women.

There's no evidence that diet, poor hygiene or sexual activity play a role in acne.

Acne is very common in teenagers and younger adults. About 80% of people aged 11 to 30 are affected by acne.

Acne is most common in girls from the ages of 14 to 17, and in boys from the ages of 16 to 19.

Most people have acne on and off for several years before their symptoms start to improve as they get older. Acne often disappears when a person is in their mid-twenties.

In some cases, acne can continue into adult life. About 5% of women and 1% of men have acne over the age of 25.

Acne is caused when tiny holes in the skin, known as hair follicles, become blocked.

In acne, the glands begin to produce too much sebum. The excess sebum mixes with dead skin cells and both substances form a plug in the follicle.

Teenage acne is thought to be triggered by increased levels of a hormone called testosterone, which occurs during puberty. The hormone plays an important role in stimulating the growth and development of the penis and testicles in boys, and maintaining muscle and bone strength in girls.

Acne can run in families. If your parents had acne, it's likely that you'll also develop it.

One study has found that if both your parents had acne, you're more likely to get more severe acne at an early age. It also found that if one or both of your parents had adult acne, you're more likely to

get adult acne too.

More than 80% of cases of adult acne occur in women. It's thought that many cases of adult acne are caused by the changes in hormone levels that many women have at certain times.

Other possible triggers of an acne flare-up include:

Despite being one of the most widespread skin conditions, acne is also one of the most poorly understood. There are many myths and misconceptions about it:

So far, research hasn't found any foods that cause acne. Eating a healthy, balanced diet is recommended because it's good for your heart and your health in general.

Most of the biological reactions that trigger acne occur beneath the skin, not on the surface, so the cleanliness of your skin has no effect on your acne. Washing your face more than twice a day could just aggravate your skin.

Having sex or masturbating won't make acne any better or worse.

There's no conclusive evidence that prolonged exposure to sunlight or using sunbeds or sunlamps can improve acne. Many medications used to treat acne can make your skin more sensitive to light, so exposure could cause painful damage to your skin, and also increase your risk of skin cancer.

You can't pass acne on to other people.

Your pharmacist can diagnose acne by looking at your skin. This involves examining your face and

possibly your chest and back for different types of spot, such as blackheads or sore, red nodules.

How many spots you have and how painful and inflamed they are will help determine how severe your acne is. This is important in planning your treatment.

4 grades can be used to measure the severity of acne:

If acne suddenly starts in adult women, it can be a sign of a hormonal imbalance, especially if it's accompanied by other symptoms such as:

Treatment for acne depends on how severe it is. It can take several months of treatment before acne symptoms improve.

The various treatments for acne are outlined below.

See your GP if your acne is more widespread, as you probably need prescription medication. For example, if:

Prescription medications that can be used to treat acne include:

If you have severe acne, your GP can refer you to an expert in treating skin conditions (dermatologist). For example, if you have:

A combination of antibiotic tablets and topical treatments is usually the first treatment option for severe acne. If this doesn't work, a medication called isotretinoin may be prescribed.

Benzoyl peroxide is usually available as a cream or gel. It's used either once or twice a day. It should be applied 20 minutes after washing to all of the parts of your face affected by acne.

Most people need a 6 week course of treatment to clear most or all of their acne. You may be advised to continue treatment less frequently to prevent acne returning.

Tretinoin and adapalene are topical retinoids used to treat acne. They're available in a gel or cream and are usually applied once a day before you go to bed.

Apply to all the parts of your face affected by acne 20 minutes after washing your face.

A 6 to 8 week course is usually recommended. After this, treatment is usually stopped, as there's a risk that the bacteria on your face could become resistant to the antibiotics. This could make your acne worse and cause additional infections.

Azelaic acid is often used as an alternative treatment for acne if the side effects of benzoyl peroxide or topical retinoids are particularly irritating or painful.

You'll usually need to use azelaic acid for a month before your acne improves.

Antibiotic tablets (oral antibiotics) are usually used in combination with a topical treatment to treat more severe acne.

It usually takes about 6 weeks before you notice an improvement in your acne.

Hormonal therapies can often benefit women with acne, especially if the acne flares up

around periods or is associated with hormonal conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome.

Co-cyprindiol is a hormonal treatment that can be used for more severe acne that doesn't respond to antibiotics. It helps to reduce the production of sebum.

You'll probably have to use co-cyprindiol for 2 to 6 months before you notice a significant improvement in your acne.

However, the drug can also cause a wide range of side effects. It's only recommended for severe cases of acne that haven't responded to other treatments.

Isotretinoin is taken as a tablet. Most people take a 4 to 6 month course. Your acne may get worse during the first 7 to 10 days of treatment. However, this is normal and soon settles.

Several treatments for acne don't involve medication.

Acne scarring can sometimes develop as a complication of acne. Any type of acne spot can lead to scarring, but it's more common when the most serious types of spots (nodules and cysts) burst and damage nearby skin.

There are 3 main types of acne scars:

Treatments for acne scarring are regarded as a type of cosmetic surgery, which isn't usually available on the NHS. However, in the past, exceptions have been made when it's been shown that acne scarring has caused serious psychological distress.

Many private clinics offer treatment for acne scarring. Prices can vary widely (from £500 to more than £10,000) depending on the type of treatment needed.

After treatment for acne scarring, most people notice a 50-75% improvement in their appearance.

Some of the available treatments for acne scarring are explained below.

Laser treatment can be used to treat mild to moderate acne scarring. There are 2 types of laser treatment: