

GoodRx Health

The Best-Value Acne Medications: How to Get the Most for Your Money



Written by [Maria Robinson, MD, MBA](#) | Reviewed by [Sophie Vergnaud, MD](#)

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Key takeaways:

- There are many acne treatment options to choose from. But figuring out what to spend your money on can feel overwhelming.
- It's possible to have a treatment plan for your acne that's both effective and affordable.
- To find the best-value acne treatments, focus on over-the-counter medications, generic prescriptions, and coupons.



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Do you have acne? If so, you're [not alone](#), and you're probably used to browsing the pharmacy aisles and online retailers for the best acne treatments. There are many different options to choose from. From facial cleansers and over-the-counter (OTC) remedies to prescription medications — there's seemingly no end to acne products you can spend your money on.

So how do you know what's worth the price tag and what's not? Here's how to navigate the complicated world of acne medications and cut through the marketing and labeling to find a treatment plan that works for you, your acne, and your pocket.

Finding the best treatment for your acne

First, it's important to know that the [best treatment](#) for you [depends on the type of acne you have](#), how severe it is, and how it affects you.

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Types of acne

There are a few [different types of acne](#). Some people have mainly one type, while others can have a combination of different types.

The main [types of acne](#) are:

- Comedonal (whiteheads and blackheads)
- Inflammatory (red bumps, pus bumps, and cysts)
- Hormonal (hormone changes causing acne)



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Acne severity and impact

There's no standard way to measure how severe acne is. But most dermatologists classify it as mild, moderate, or severe. This usually depends on [how much acne](#) you have and whether it will cause permanent scarring.

Other things to consider when deciding on the best treatment for acne are:

- Where it is on the body
- Whether there are changes like skin darkening or scarring
- How acne is affecting a person's quality of life (like social embarrassment or depression)

Finally, all types and severities of acne usually include some form of topical treatment (like a cream, gel, or wash). This includes prescription and OTC medications. It's good to keep these things in mind as you look for your best-value treatment plan.

Best-value topical acne medications

There are many different topical acne treatments for both teens and adults. It's common to use a combination of them. You can start with one and build up. Or you can try treatments that combine two medications in one single product.

Either way, it helps to know which active ingredient you're looking for when shopping for acne treatments. Keep in mind that medications come in different strengths and forms (like creams, washes, and gels) — so be sure you know what you're buying.

Here are some topical acne medications that are both effective and affordable.

Over-the-counter topical medications

You don't need a prescription to find some of the most effective and least expensive acne treatments. Here are a few great options:

- Benzoyl peroxide is available for [under \\$10](#), and it comes in [different strengths and formulations](#).
- [Differin gel](#) is a type of [retinoid](#) that's now available OTC at lower cost (under \$15 at some online stores).

Combining these treatments with each other or with other topical medications (like salicylic acid) makes them work even better. And that makes them even more cost effective.

Prescription topical medications

For some types of acne, a prescription-strength topical medication is needed. This is often used in combination with other medications, including OTC medications. Here are some great, affordable options:

- [Clindamycin](#) and [erythromycin](#) are topical antibiotics that are available in less expensive generic forms for [under \\$15](#) in some cases.
- [Tretinoin](#) is a topical retinoid that is extremely effective in treating acne, and its generic form can be less than \$20 per month with a [coupon](#).

Best-value oral acne treatments

Oral medications (pills) are usually used to treat moderate and severe acne, or acne that happens because of hormone changes. People usually use these along with topical treatments.

Here are some of the best-value acne prescription pills for acne.

Oral antibiotics

Antibiotic pills are usually used for 3 to 6 months, but it can be longer in some people. The most commonly used antibiotics are [doxycycline](#) and [minocycline](#). With coupons, their generic versions are under \$20 a month.

If you're looking for something even less expensive, these generic antibiotics can also help treat acne. There aren't as many studies on them, so they usually aren't used as the first-choice option. But they could be a good option in the right situation. Examples include:

- [Trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole](#)
- [Amoxicillin](#)
- [Cephalexin](#)

Hormonal acne treatment

Hormonal changes can bring on acne. This is especially true for teenagers and adult women, like during periods, pregnancy, and around menopause.

Here are two affordable and very effective options for hormonal acne:

- Combination [oral contraceptives](#) (birth control pills) are usually covered by insurance. And people without insurance can get them for free or at low cost from Planned Parenthood.
- [Spironolactone](#) is available in generic form for less than \$10 a month.

Isotretinoin (Accutane)

[Isotretinoin](#) (Accutane) is a very effective treatment for severe cystic acne, and it's usually used for 4 to 5 months. For some people, one course of treatment completely clears their acne. Isotretinoin is one of the more expensive acne medications, but it can be life-changing in the right people.

8 pro tips on how to save on your acne medications

Here are some basic steps you can take to lower the cost of your acne treatment.

1. Use over-the-counter products when possible

OTC medications are usually cheaper than prescription ones. The good news is that many of the best acne medications, like benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid, are available OTC. The first prescription-strength topical retinoid — adapalene (Differin) — is now also available OTC.

For mild or moderate acne, using some, or even all, OTC products in your treatment plan can help keep the cost down.

2. Stick with generics

In general, generic medications are less expensive than brand names. And they work just as well. Ask your healthcare provider if any of your prescriptions are available in generic form.

3. Ask your provider for samples

Many dermatologists have medication samples they can give to patients. Sometimes, finding the best acne treatments involves some trial and error. You may have to try a few medications before finding the right one. Your doctor may be able to give you a few months worth of medication so you can try it before you commit to paying for it.

4. Create combination treatments

There are several combination acne medications — like adapalene and benzoyl peroxide (Epiduo) — that work very well for acne. The problem is that they are often more expensive. Instead, you can combine the individual medications. This may be cheaper and work just as well.

5. Use medications on your insurance formulary

Usually your insurance will cover certain medications for a specific condition, like acne. And because these are covered, they are cheaper than medications that are not on your [formulary](#). Contact your insurance company to see exactly which medications are covered and make sure your doctor prescribes those.

6. Use available coupons

In many cases, there are coupons you can use for medications. Some pharmaceutical companies provide coupons, especially for new products. Your doctor may have some of these coupons in their office. You can also check online. Using GoodRx is also an extremely helpful tool to find coupons and savings for all medications.

7. Use medications correctly

It's important to use your medications as directed, especially any creams or lotions. This way you don't waste any. Plus, you'll be less likely to get skin irritation and give up on using it.

8. Be patient

Acne medications can take a while to start working — sometimes it can seem like forever. The general rule of thumb is to give a medication at least 3 months to work. If you stop using it before this, you may be throwing away a good treatment (and dollars) without even realizing it. Being patient can save you money!

The bottom line

There are many effective over-the-counter and prescription acne treatments. Having a good acne treatment plan is important. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be hard on your wallet. Tips for finding the best-value treatment include using OTC medications when possible, sticking to generic prescriptions, and using coupons like those available at [GoodRx](#).

References

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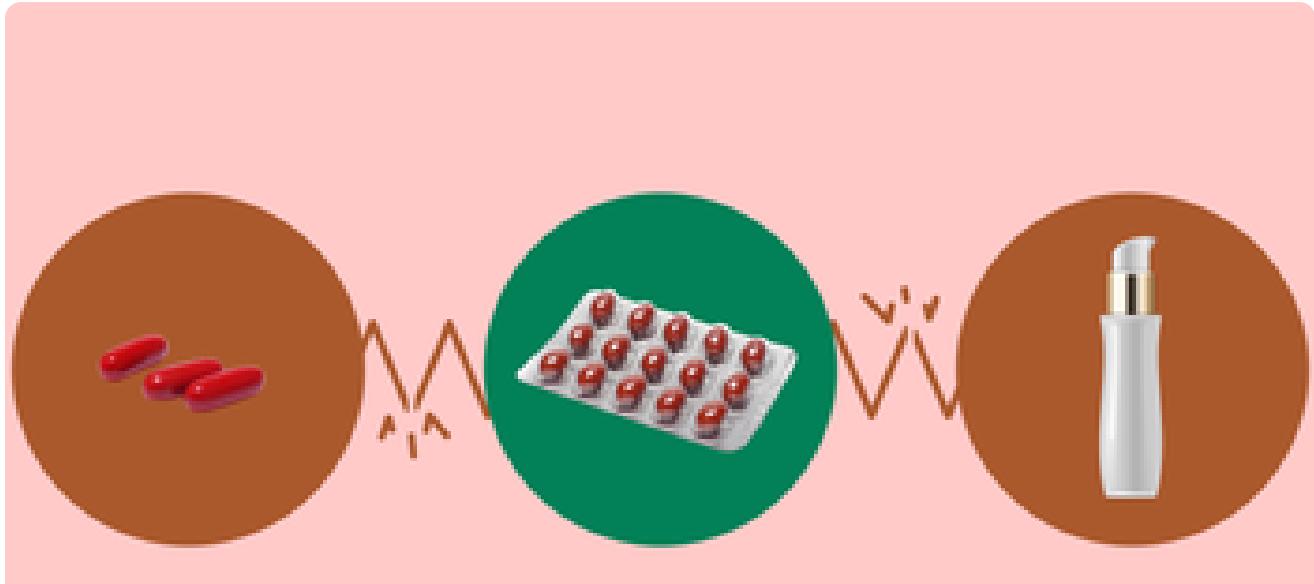
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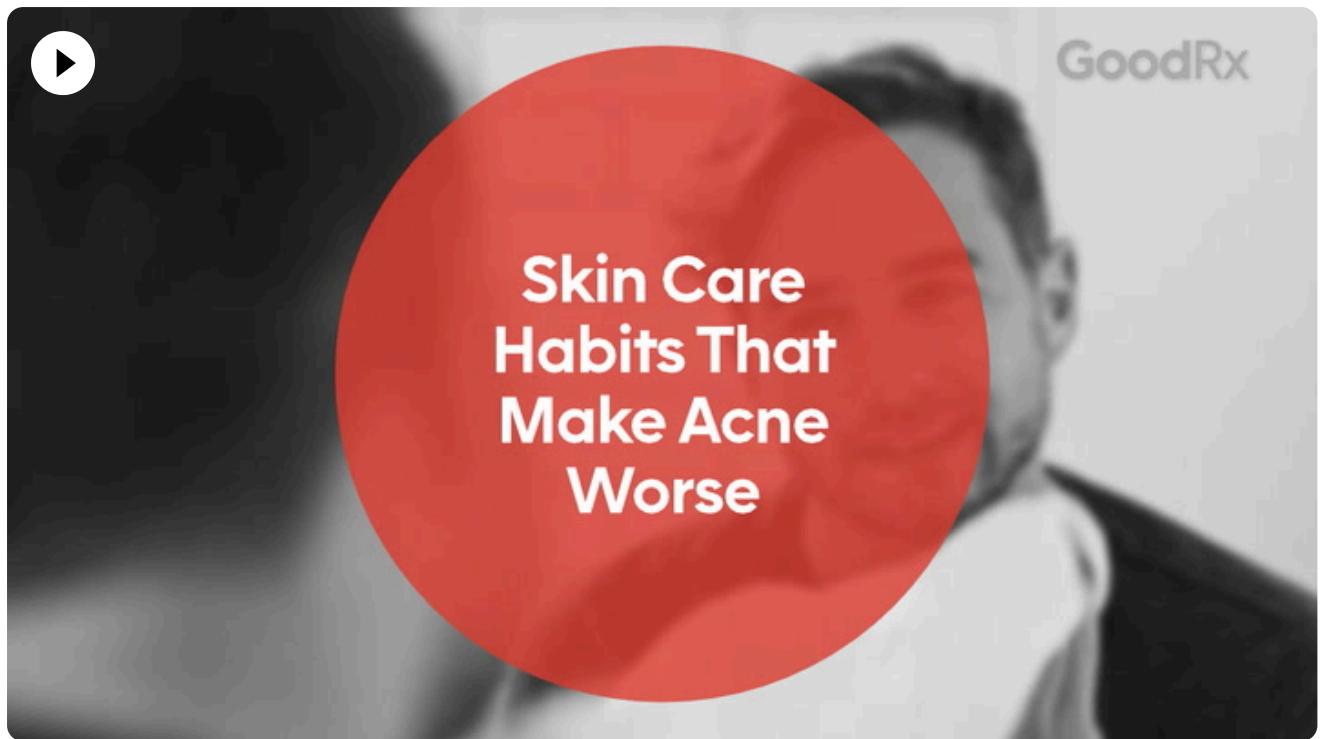
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