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BACK ACNE: HOW TO SEE CLEARER SKIN



Dermatologists recommend wearing sweat-wicking clothes when working out.

If you have acne on your back—or “bacne” as some people call it—you don’t have to wait for it to clear on its own. Treatment and the right skin care can help you see clearer skin more quickly.

You may even be able to clear your back on your own.

Who can treat back acne at home?

You may see clearer skin from treating it yourself if you:

- Have a few blemishes on your back (mild acne)
- Developed back acne recently
- Have a mix of whiteheads, blackheads, and pimples on your back, but nothing that’s painful or goes deep into the skin (moderate acne)

Anyone who has deep, painful acne on their back (or anywhere else) will need a dermatologist’s help.

OTC treatment for back acne that works

OTC stands for over-the-counter. It’s medical jargon that means any treatment that you can buy without a prescription.

Studies show that the following OTC acne products can help clear mild (or moderate) back acne when used along with acne-friendly skin care:

Benzoyl peroxide (emollient foam wash): This helps to kill the bacteria that cause acne. Used daily, it can help control back acne and reduce flares.

Benzoyl peroxide needs time to work

Studies show that benzoyl peroxide works best if left on the back for two to five minutes.



Letting the benzoyl peroxide sit on your skin for a few minutes has two advantages.

1. This approach helps the medicine penetrate your skin. Skin is thicker on the back than on the face.
2. Rinsing it off prevents bleached clothes, sheets, and towels. Benzoyl peroxide is known to bleach fabrics.

You'll find OTC benzoyl peroxide foaming washes in different strengths. Using a product that contains 5.3% benzoyl peroxide is less likely to cause irritated skin, dryness, or peeling.

If you feel that you need stronger medicine, you can start with a foaming wash that contains 10% benzoyl peroxide. That's the strongest concentration of benzoyl peroxide that you can buy without a prescription.

Retinoid (adapalene 0.1% gel): Using this along with benzoyl peroxide can improve your results. This OTC retinoid can help unclog pores, which will help the benzoyl peroxide work better.

Dermatologists recommend applying adapalene after you shower or before going to bed. Again, you want to apply it daily.

How to apply medicine to your back

For treatment to work, you must get it on your back. Investing in a lotion applicator for the back can help you apply the medicine where you want it.

If you're not sure where to find one of these, just search online for a "lotion applicator for the back."

Acne friendly skin care essential

To get the results you expect from treatment, you'll also need acne-friendly skin care. Without it, your acne can flare, even when you're treating it.

To help their patients with back acne get the best results, dermatologists recommend the following:

1. Develop these habits when working out or getting sweaty.

- Wear loose-fitting workout clothes made of cotton or sweat-wicking fabric.
- Wash workout clothes after each use.
- Shower and change clothes ASAP after working out (or doing anything that causes you to sweat).

If you cannot shower immediately, use an oil-free cleansing wipe to gently wipe off your sweaty skin. You'll also want to change out of sweaty clothes.

- 2. Cleanse your skin gently.** Scrubbing skin with acne may seem best, but this actually worsens acne. When washing your back and applying acne treatment, you want to be gentle.
- 3. Stop irritating your skin with harsh skin care products.** Antibacterial soaps, astringents, and abrasive scrubs can worsen acne. Ditto for loofahs, back brushes, and buff puffs. For best results, you'll want to use gentle, fragrance-free skin-care products.
- 4. Use oil-free skin care products and cosmetics.** The packaging may read "non-comedogenic," "non-acnegenic," "won't clog pores," or "oil-free."
- 5. Avoid using anything that rubs against your back, such as a backpack.** Anything that rubs against your back can irritate your skin, causing back acne to flare. Swap a backpack for a handheld bag. If you carry a purse on your shoulder, place the strap on your arm.
- 6. Resist the temptation to pick and pop acne, even on your back.** This will only worsen acne.

Choose the right sunscreen

Buy non-comedogenic, SPF 30, broad-spectrum, and water resistant sunscreen.



- 7. Protect your skin from the sun.** People often believe that the sun's rays will help clear acne, but the sun can actually worsen acne. The sun's rays tend to darken acne and cause it to last longer.

You can help clear acne by always wearing oil-free sunscreen when outdoors. You'll want to apply sunscreen to all skin that clothes won't cover.

When to see a dermatologist

It can take time to see results from treatment. If treatment works, you may start to see results in six to eight weeks. Complete clearing can take three or four months.

If you don't see any difference in six to eight weeks, you may need a dermatologist's help. [With a dermatologist's help](#), virtually every type of acne can be successfully treated.

Have a skin, hair, or nail problem?

No one understands your skin better than a board-certified dermatologist. Partner with the expert for the best care.

What is a dermatologist?



Related AAD resources

- [Acne can affect more than your skin](#)
- [Acne myths: Are any preventing you from seeing clearer skin?](#)

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