

## Dermatologists Urge Consumers to Treat Acne Early

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Treating acne when it first appears can reduce severity, scarring and acne-related anxiety.



Acne is the most common skin condition in the United States, affecting up to 50 million Americans annually. However, despite its prevalence, accurate information about acne can be scarce. Many teenagers and young adults believe that they have to let acne run its course instead of treating it, while others turn to do-it-yourself treatments — like applying diaper cream or toothpaste to pimples — without much success. Yet left untreated, say dermatologists from the American Academy of Dermatology, acne often results in significant physical and psychological problems, such as scarring, poor self-esteem, depression and anxiety.

*“As a dermatologist who treats patients with acne every day, I’ve seen firsthand the effects that acne can have on a person’s life, both physically and emotionally,”* says board-certified dermatologist Dee Anna Glaser, MD, FAAD, a professor and interim chair of dermatology at Saint Louis University School of Medicine in St. Louis. *“If you find yourself in a bad mood or skipping outings with friends or family members because of acne, see a board-certified dermatologist for treatment.”* Today, says Dr. Glaser, there are many effective treatments for acne, including medications that are applied to the skin, antibiotics and in-office procedures. Some treatments that are applied to the skin, such as products containing benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid or adapalene, are available over-the-counter.

However, whether a person is using an over-the-counter treatment or prescription medication, Dr. Glaser says it’s important to be patient regarding results. For example, it usually takes four to eight weeks to see improvement after using a topical medication — a treatment that is applied to the skin — and once acne clears, she says, it’s important to continue the treatment to prevent new breakouts.

It’s also important, says Dr. Glaser, to follow your dermatologist’s directions while using acne medication. Particularly for topical medications, the wrong application and skin care routine can lead to dry, irritated skin.

To get the greatest benefit from topical acne medications, Dr. Glaser recommends the following tips:

Use a gentle face wash. A common misconception is that people need to use a strong face wash while also using topical acne medication. However, using a face wash that is too harsh while also using acne medication can dry out and irritate your skin. Instead, look for a mild, gentle face wash that says “oil-free” or “noncomedogenic” on the label, as these won’t clog your pores. Gently wash the affected areas twice a day and after sweating.

Use a pea-sized amount of medication. Using too much medication can irritate your skin, and using too little can hinder results. To make sure you’re using the right amount, put a pea-sized amount on your index finger and dot the medication on your forehead, cheeks and chin. Once dotted, rub it around to cover your whole face.

Ease into the medication. Since it can take time for your skin to adjust to a new medication, start by applying the product every other day instead of daily. If you don’t experience any negative side effects after a few weeks, like increased burning or redness, you can start applying the medicine every day.

If irritation occurs, apply moisturizer before applying acne medication. Studies have shown that applying moisturizer before applying topical medication helps prevent the medication’s negative side effects — like peeling and redness — without changing its effectiveness. Make sure your moisturizer says “oil-free” or “noncomedogenic.”

Protect your skin from the sun. Many acne medications cause increased sensitivity to sunlight, which can increase your chance of sunburn. Before going outdoors, apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 to all exposed skin, including your scalp, ears, neck and lips. Remember to reapply every two hours or immediately after sweating. You can also protect your skin by seeking shade and wearing protective clothing, including a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses with UV protection.

*“Acne is a complex skin condition that can have many causes, including skin care products, fluctuating hormones, family history and stress,”* says Dr. Glaser. *“Further, not everyone’s acne can be treated the same way. If you have acne and over-the-counter medications aren’t bringing relief, make an appointment to see a board-certified dermatologist.”*

In recognition of National Healthy Skin Month, the AAD is reminding the public about how to find trustworthy sources of information on skin disease, including acne, skin cancer, eczema and psoriasis. A board-certified dermatologist has the education, training and experience to provide the best possible medical, surgical and cosmetic treatment to patients. After earning a bachelor’s degree and medical degree, board-certified dermatologists must complete four additional years of education, including a one-year internship and three years of dermatology residency. Before seeking dermatologic care, the AAD recommends that everyone make sure their dermatologist is board-certified by the American Board of Dermatology, the American Osteopathic Association, or the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

To find a board-certified dermatologist in your area, visit [aad.org/findaderm](http://aad.org/findaderm).

The tips above are demonstrated in “How to Apply Topical Acne Medication,” a video posted to the AAD website and YouTube channel. This video is part of the AAD’s “Video of the Month” series, which offers tips people can use to properly care for their skin, hair and nails. A new video in the series posts to the AAD website and YouTube channel each month.

## About the AAD

Headquartered in Rosemont, Ill., the American Academy of Dermatology, founded in 1938, is the largest, most influential, and most representative of all dermatologic associations. With a membership of more than 19,000 physicians worldwide, the AAD is committed to: advancing the diagnosis and medical, surgical and cosmetic treatment of the skin, hair and nails; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education, and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care for a lifetime of healthier skin, hair and nails. For more information, contact the AAD at (888) 462-DERM (3376) or [aad.org](http://aad.org). Follow the AAD on Facebook (American Academy of Dermatology), Twitter (@AADskin), Instagram (@AADskin1), or YouTube (AcademyofDermatology).

“Left untreated, acne often results in significant physical and psychological problems, such as scarring, poor self-esteem, depression and anxiety” via @AADskin

