

How to take action against acne

January 26 2018, by Julie Davis, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Waiting for acne to clear up on its own can be frustrating, especially for teens who are already self-conscious about their appearance.

Untreated [acne](#) can cause [low self-esteem](#) and anxiety as well as permanent facial scars. Ignoring it or assuming kids will outgrow it can harm them physically and emotionally. Acne can also continue into the adult years, and be especially problematic for women.

Mild cases with just a few blemishes or blackheads may respond in a month or two to over-the-counter drugstore products with ingredients such as [benzoyl peroxide](#) or [salicylic acid](#). These are designed to unblock pores and encourage cell turnover.

But deep pimples and inflamed pustules need the strength of prescription products and the know-how of a dermatologist.

Most prescriptions are topical. That means they're applied to the skin, typically to kill bacteria and/or reduce oil. Often in gel form, they may contain a retinoid (a vitamin A-based ingredient), prescription-strength benzoyl peroxide, or antibiotics. There are many effective combinations that your dermatologist can recommend. If one doesn't work, another might.

Severe acne, with cysts and nodules, often needs medication in pill form, from antibiotics to the most powerful vitamin A drug called isotretinoin. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, one 4- or 5-month course of isotretinoin brings about clear skin in 85 percent of patients. However, it can have serious side effects, primarily birth defects, so it's essential that people taking it don't become pregnant (or even breast-feed) while on it.

There are also many office procedures that may help, such as lasers and other light therapies; chemical peels; and extractions, which remove stubborn cysts and help prevent scarring.

With so many options, there's no reason to suffer through this [skin](#)

condition.

More information: The American Academy of Dermatology has a section on [acne](#) on its website, including the latest treatments.

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Citation: How to take action against acne (2018, January 26) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-01-action-acne.html>

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