

Acne is a common skin condition that occurs when hair follicles become clogged with oil (sebum), dead skin cells, and sometimes bacteria. This blockage leads to the development of various types of spots, including whiteheads, blackheads, pimples, cysts, and nodules. Acne most often appears on the face, chest, back, and shoulders, and can affect people of all ages, though it is most common during adolescence.

Causes of Acne

Several factors contribute to the development of acne:

- **Excess Sebum Production:** Overactive sebaceous (oil) glands produce too much oil, which can clog pores.
- **Clogged Pores:** Dead skin cells can accumulate and block hair follicles, trapping oil inside.
- **Bacterial Growth:** The blocked environment allows bacteria, particularly *Cutibacterium acnes* (formerly *Propionibacterium acnes*), to multiply, leading to inflammation.
- **Hormonal Changes:** Fluctuations in hormones, especially during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, or due to certain medical conditions, can increase oil production.
- **Other Triggers:** Stress, some medications (like corticosteroids, lithium, or certain contraceptives), greasy cosmetics, and underlying health conditions can also play a role.

Symptoms

- Whiteheads (closed, clogged pores)
- Blackheads (open, clogged pores)
- Papules (small, red, tender bumps)
- Pimples (pustules with pus at the tip)
- Nodules (large, painful lumps beneath the skin)
- Cysts (painful, pus-filled lumps under the skin)
- Oily skin, redness, and sometimes pain or tenderness

Treatment Options

Treatment depends on the severity and persistence of acne:

Mild Acne:

- Over-the-counter treatments containing benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, or sulfur.
- Gentle cleansers and non-comedogenic moisturizers.

Moderate Acne:

- Prescription-strength topical treatments (retinoids, antibiotics, or stronger benzoyl peroxide).
- Oral antibiotics to reduce bacteria and inflammation.
- Hormonal treatments (such as certain birth control pills) for some women.

Severe Acne:

- Oral isotretinoin (a vitamin A derivative) for severe, cystic, or treatment-resistant acne.
- Combination therapies, including oral antibiotics, topical retinoids, and benzoyl peroxide.
- Other options may include corticosteroid injections for large, painful nodules or cysts.

General Care Tips

- Wash your face gently twice daily with a mild cleanser.
- Avoid picking or squeezing spots to reduce the risk of scarring.
- Use oil-free, non-comedogenic skincare and makeup products.
- Stay consistent with your treatment plan, as improvement may take several weeks.

With the right approach, most cases of acne can be managed effectively, reducing both physical symptoms and the risk of long-term scarring. If over-the-counter treatments are not effective, consult a healthcare provider or dermatologist for further evaluation and treatment.