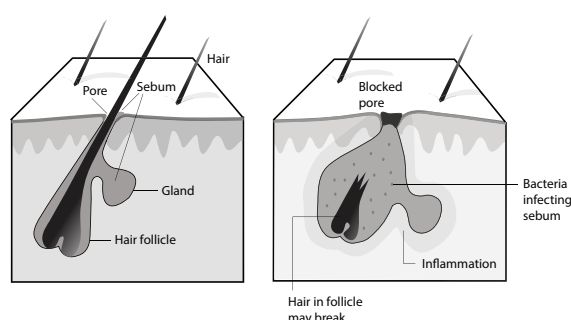


ACNE

Acne is a common cause of spots, especially in people aged 12 to 25.

Acne most often develops on your face, and sometimes on your back and chest. Different types of spots may develop: blackheads and whiteheads, red bumps called papules, and pustules, which are like papules but contain pus.



An oily substance called sebum is produced by glands in your skin. These glands are attached to tiny holes or pores in your skin in which hairs grow (hair follicles). The sebum moves to the skin surface through this pore to help stop your skin from drying out. In acne, your glands start to produce too much sebum and these pores become blocked.

This is partly because the skin at the top of the pore gets thicker, and partly because bits of dead skin block the pores. A whitehead is caused by a blockage close to the skin surface; a blackhead is caused if the blocked pore is open to the skin.

When sebum builds up underneath blocked pores, the normally harmless bacteria that live on your skin may infect the blocked pores. This causes papules and pustules, and sometimes hard, painful lumps (nodules) and large, pus-filled lumps (cysts).

How can I treat acne?

Benzoyl peroxide gel works by killing the bacteria on your skin. It also reduces swelling and helps to unblock pores.

To treat:

- Wash and dry your skin 20 minutes before using benzoyl peroxide gel.
- Spread the gel thinly on the parts of your skin that have acne (for example, all of your face); don't just apply it to the individual spots.
- Take care not to get benzoyl peroxide gel in your eyes or mouth.

Benzoyl peroxide gel can make your skin feel itchy or like it is burning. Your skin may peel or look red. This is more likely to happen when you first start using benzoyl peroxide gel. It may help to use the gel once a day instead of twice, until your skin gets used to it. If this is still too much, try using benzoyl peroxide gel once or twice a week, then slowly build up to daily use.

Keep using the benzoyl peroxide gel because it takes time to work, usually 6 to 12 weeks. You can buy further supplies of benzoyl peroxide gel from your pharmacy.

Benzoyl peroxide gel may make your skin more sensitive to sunlight. Avoid too much sun exposure, or apply sunscreen. The gel may also cause bleaching so try not to get it on your hair or clothes.

What else can help?

- Try not to pick or squeeze your spots because this can make them worse and you may get scars.
- Don't wash your acne more than twice a day. Use a gentle soap or cleanser and don't scrub your skin too hard. Acne is not caused by poor hygiene and too much washing can make your acne worse.
- If you have dry skin, use a fragrance-free, water-based moisturiser.
- Don't use too much make-up. Use water-based make-up that does not block pores (non-comedogenic), and make sure you remove it before going to bed.
- Diet has little or no effect on acne. However, if you notice that certain foods make your acne worse, then try to avoid them.
- Sunlight and ultraviolet (UV) light probably have little benefit on acne. Apply sunscreen when you are out in the sun.
- Stress probably doesn't cause acne, but acne can make you feel stressed. See your GP if your acne is making you feel unhappy.

Can I give acne to other people?

No, acne is not infectious and you can't pass it on to other people.

Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if:

- you have a lot of large, lumpy spots (with or without pus)
- your acne has given you scars
- your acne is making you upset
- you have already taken medicine by mouth for your acne
- the medicine you bought at your pharmacy is not making your acne better
- you are younger than 12 years old.

Where can I find further information?

Patient UK: www.patient.info

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.