

Wellness Articles

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Learn more about acne

Did you know that September is Acne Awareness Month in Canada?

Acne, or acne vulgaris, is a skin problem that starts when oil and dead skin cells clog up your pores. Some people call it blackheads, blemishes, whiteheads, pimples, or zits. When you have just a few red spots, or pimples, you have a mild form of acne. Severe acne can mean hundreds of pimples that can cover the face, neck, chest, and back. Or it can be bigger, solid, red lumps that are painful (cysts).

Acne is very common among teenagers. It usually gets better after the teenage years. Some women who never had acne growing up will have it as an adult, often right before their menstrual periods.

How you feel about your acne may not be related to how bad it is. Some people who have severe acne are not bothered by it. Others are embarrassed or upset even though they have only a few pimples.

The good news is that there are many good treatments that can help you get acne under control.

What causes acne?

Acne starts when oil and dead skin cells clog the skin's pores. If germs get into the pores, the result can be swelling, redness, and pus.

For most people, acne starts during the teenage years. This is because hormone changes make the skin oilier after puberty starts.

Acne can run in families. If one of your parents had severe acne, you are more likely to have it.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of acne include whiteheads, blackheads, and pimples. These can occur on the face, neck, shoulders, back, or chest. Pimples that are large and deep are called cystic lesions. These can be painful if they get infected. They also can scar the skin.

How is acne treated?

To help control acne, keep your skin clean. Avoid skin products that clog your pores. Look for products that say "non-comedogenic" on the label. Wash your skin once or twice a day with a gentle soap or acne wash. Try not to scrub or pick at your pimples. This can make them worse and can cause scars.

If you have just a few pimples to treat, you can get an acne cream without a prescription. Look for one that has adapalene, benzoyl peroxide, or salicylic acid. These work best when used just the way the label says.

It can take time to get acne under control. But if you haven't had good results with non-prescription products after trying them for three months, see your doctor. A prescription gel or skin cream may be all you need. If you are a woman, taking certain birth control pills may help.

If you have acne cysts, your doctor may suggest a stronger medicine, such as isotretinoin. This medicine works very well for some kinds of acne.

What can be done about acne scars?

There are many skin treatments, such as laser resurfacing or dermabrasion, that can help acne scars look better and feel smoother. Ask your doctor about them. The best treatment for you depends on how severe the scarring is. Your doctor may refer you to a plastic surgeon.