

Should you contact your doctor?

You should contact your doctor if -

- Your acne is getting worse.
- Preparations from the pharmacy don't seem to be helping.
- You develop large lumps or cysts.
- You are left with scars.

If your acne is severe, seeing your doctor early can help prevent scars developing.

Will antibiotics help?

Mild acne will probably get better without needing to use antibiotics.

However, if your acne is severe, your doctor can prescribe a long-term course of antibiotics, and, if necessary, refer you to a dermatologist.

Doctors are not keen to give antibiotics unless there is a real need. There are two reasons for this. Firstly using antibiotics too much, or when they are not needed, **encourages bacteria to become resistant. This means the antibiotic will no longer be effective against the bacteria.** Secondly antibiotics themselves can cause side effects such as diarrhoea, skin rashes and stomach upsets.

There is plenty you can do yourself to help relieve your symptoms.



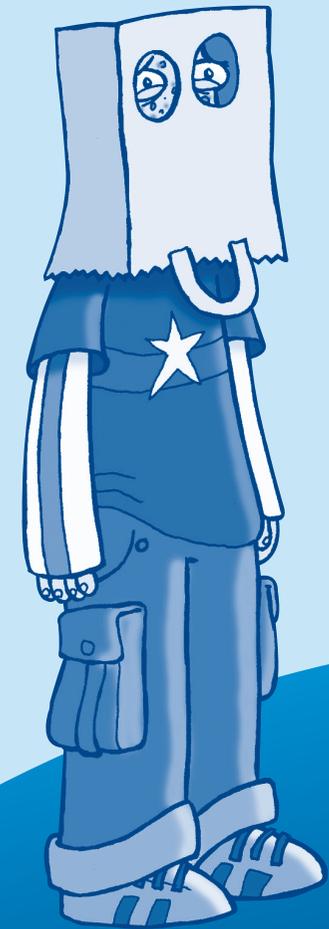
If you would like to find out more about self-treating common health problems ask your pharmacist or call the free **healthline on 0500 20 20 30** for advice or to find out the location of your nearest **healthpoint**, or email **healthpoint@nhs.net**

This publication is also available in large print and on computer disk. Other formats and languages can be supplied on request.

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Acne?



So what can you do?

Who does acne affect?

Acne mainly affects teenagers, but it can also affect older men and women.

The good news is that acne can be treated effectively.

How does it develop?

Small sebaceous glands in your skin produce an oily, waxy substance called sebum. This helps to protect your skin and hair. However, if the openings to these glands (pores) become blocked with a mixture of sebum and dead skin, an infection can start. Pus builds up behind the blockage and the gland swells.

Eventually the pressure causes the spot to 'burst' and release the pus.



How will you know if you have acne?

Spots - blackheads, whiteheads and larger spots - appear mainly on the face, but sometimes on the neck, chest, back and upper arms.

They come in cycles, with some spots healing while new spots appear.

What might cause acne?

- Changes in your hormone levels, especially around puberty.
- Over-using make-up and concealer - as these can remove the skin's natural protective coating of friendly bacteria, or cause the skin to become dry.
- Stress, and being 'run-down' can be a factor in causing acne.

What **doesn't** cause acne?

- Eating too much chocolate - despite what you might have been told, this is just not true.
- Dirty skin - in fact washing too often, especially with strong soaps, can help to cause acne by stripping away your skin's natural defences.

How can you help prevent acne?

- Avoid harsh soap, use mild cleanser and lots of water. Don't use cleansers containing alcohol, as this is very drying.
- Use only water-based make-up, rather than oil-based.

How can you treat yourself?

Resist the temptation to squeeze - this can cause scarring. Wash well, and if possible use paper towels or tissues to dry your face. Lotions containing benzoyl peroxide can help if you have mild to moderate acne. This can take several weeks to take effect, so don't give up too early.

How can your pharmacist help?

Pharmacists are highly-trained health professionals. They can advise on over-the-counter products which can help treat the symptoms of acne.

Always tell your pharmacist if you are taking any other medication. They can also help with any queries you may have about medicines which your doctor may have prescribed. Remember also that you don't need an appointment to see your pharmacist.

