

What is acne?

- Acne, an inflammatory disorder of the sebaceous glands, is one of the most common dermatological disorders and is considered a chronic disease
- Treatment may be required to improve both the physical appearance and prevent physical and psychological scarring
- Whilst it is primarily a skin disorder of the young, often clearing up spontaneously, it can affect up to 12% of women and 3% of men over the age of 25
- Treatment options for all age groups and both sexes are largely the same, apart from hormonal therapy

Important information about treatments

- Treatments are effective but take time to work (typically up to 8 weeks) and may irritate the skin, especially at the start of treatment
- Topical and systemic antibiotics should not be prescribed together, or used as sole treatment, as bacterial resistance is a growing concern
- All treatments should be routinely reviewed at 12 weeks
- In the event of pregnancy, topical retinoids and oral tetracyclines should be discontinued

At review

If treatment goals are reached at the 12 week review:

- Maintenance therapy should be considered
- Discontinue topical/systemic antibiotics

If treatment goals are NOT reached at the 12 week review:

- Review adherence to treatment(s)
- Consider alternative treatments

Grading acne based on lesion type can help guide treatment

| Treatment graded by the predominant lesion type present | Comedones | Papules | Pustules | Nodules/cysts* |
|--|-----------|---------|----------|----------------|
| Topical retinoid <i>Tretinoin, Isotretinoin & Adapalene</i> | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Benzoyl peroxide (BPO) | ✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ |
| Azelaic acid 20%— <i>Skinoren</i> | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| Topical antibiotics | | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | |
| Topical retinoid/BPO— <i>Epiduo 0.1% and 0.3%</i> | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ |
| Topical retinoid/antibiotic combination— <i>Treclin</i> | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | |
| Topical antibiotic/BPO combination— <i>Duac</i> | | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | |
| Oral antibiotics | | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| Combined oral contraceptives (for females only) | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |

Red flag

Refer immediately if:

- Severe psychological distress
- Uncontrolled acne developing scarring
- Nodulo-cystic acne*
- Diagnostic uncertainty
- Patients failing to respond to multiple therapeutic interventions or to two adequate courses of antibiotics (12 weeks each)

✓✓✓=strong recommendation
 ✓✓=moderate recommendation
 ✓=low recommendation

* Nodules/cysts

Treatment can be initiated, but patients should be referred