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# **The Complete Guide to Acne; Prevention, Treatment and Remedies.**

**By Pamela Archer**

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## Contents

<b>Please Read This FIRST .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Terms of Use.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Disclaimer.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Acne - An Overview.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2. What is Acne? .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Definition of Acne .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3. Who Develops Acne? .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4. What is the Real Cause of Acne? .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>The Hair Follicle and the Sebaceous Glands.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<b>Sebum .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Hormonal control of sebum.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Role of Sebum .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>Why Do We Get Acne? .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5. Types of Acne Lesions .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6. Scars and Stripes - Scarring in Acne .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Definition .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Types of Scars .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>I. Color changes due to inflammatory lesions .....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Treatment for post- inflammatory pigmentation.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<b>II. Physical disfigurements in the form of pits or lumps .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Treatment Options .....</i>	<i>22</i>
<b>7. Seborrhea Due to Hormonal Changes .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Causes of High Levels of Androgens in Women .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>8. Factors Which Aggravate Acne.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Acne Lesions.....</b>	<b>27</b>

<i>Inflammatory acne</i> .....	27
<i>Non-Inflammatory acne</i> .....	27
<b>9. Acne Vulgaris</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Pathophysiology of Acne vulgaris</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Diagnosis</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Management of Acne Vulgaris</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<i>Topical treatments</i> .....	<i>31</i>
<i>Systemic treatments</i> .....	<i>32</i>
<b>Surgical Options</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Prognosis</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<i>Precaution for Patients</i> .....	<i>34</i>
<b>10. Acne Conglobata or Cystic Acne</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Patho-physiology of Acne conglobata</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<i>Characteristics</i> .....	<i>35</i>
<i>Treatment</i> .....	<i>36</i>
<b>11. Severe Acne: Acne Fulminans or Acne Maligna</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Features of Acne fulminans</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<i>Pathophysiology</i> .....	<i>38</i>
<i>Medical Care</i> .....	<i>39</i>
<i>Prognosis</i> .....	<i>39</i>
<b>Management</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>12. Comedonal Acne</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>The Way Out</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>13. Acne Keloidalis Nuchae</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Treatment</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>14. Acne in Pregnancy</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<i>Medicines to be avoided during Pregnancy</i> .....	<i>44</i>
<i>Treatment of Acne during Pregnancy</i> .....	<i>44</i>
<b>15. Acne Excorié</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>Treatment</b> .....	<b>45</b>

<b>16. Newborn or Infantile Acne .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Infantile Acne.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>17. Acne Due to Medicines.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Hormonal Medicines .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Other Types of Medicines .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Precautions.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>18. How to Diagnosis Acne.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Prognosis .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>19. Ten Tips to Avoid Acne.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>20. Useful Tips to Reduce Acne Naturally.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>21. Tips to Prevent Worsening of Acne .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>22. Step One: - Keeping Your Face Clean.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>23. Step Two: - Using Acne Face Creams.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>24. Step Three: - Relieving Your Constipation.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>25. Step Four: - Making Changes to Your Diet .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>26. Step Five: - Foods to Avoid.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>27. Step Six: - Using Essential Fatty Acid .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>28. Step Seven: - Using Fish Oil.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>29. Step Eight: - Juices You Should Be Drinking .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>30. Step Nine: - Fruits You Should Eat .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>31. Step Ten: - Vegetables to Eat.....</b>	<b>67</b>

<b>32. Step Eleven: - Eating Protein-Rich Food .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>33. Step Twelve: - The Vitamins You Should Take.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>34. Step Thirteen: – Herbal Mixtures.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>35. Step Fourteen: – Changing Your Thinking .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>36. The Psychosocial Impact of Acne.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>37. Myths and Misinformation about Acne.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>38. When to Seek Professional Help.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>39. Tips for Clear, Beautiful Skin .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>40. Acne Treatment .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>41. Treatment of Mild Acne.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>1. Benzoyl peroxide.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<i>Possible problems with benzoyl peroxide products: .....</i>	<i>82</i>
<b>2. Azelaic acid.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>3. Topical Retinoids .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>42. Treatment of Moderate Acne .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>43. Treatment of Severe Acne.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>1. Isotretinoin .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<i>Properties of isotretinoin .....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Side Effects and Precautions.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<b>Monitoring the Patients.....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>2. Accutane .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>3. Corticosteroids .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4. Surgery .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>44. The Powerful Effects of Accutane -The Risky Miracle Drug.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>What is Accutane? .....</b>	<b>92</b>

<b>1. Risks during Pregnancy and Lactation.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>2. Psychiatric Distress.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>3. Abdominal Problems .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4. Effects on the Bones and Muscles.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>5. Brain Problems .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>6. Problems with Vision.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>7. Effects on Hearing .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>8. Effects on Lipid Levels .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>9. Allergies .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>10. Blood Sugar Problems.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Symptoms of other Serious Problems .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<i>Some less Serious Side-Effects .....</i>	<i>98</i>
<b>Precautions for Patients .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>The Treatment Procedure.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>45. Budget Friendly Home Remedies for Acne.....</b>	<b>101</b>



## Part-I: Introduction

### 1. Acne - An Overview

Acne is inflammation of the skin, due to blockage of your skin's pores. Blockage occurs due to an excessive secretion from the skin's oil glands and accumulated, dead skin cells. This combination encourages the skin bacterium **Propionibacterium** which multiplies and causes increased skin inflammation. Acne comes from the Greek word, **ἀκμή or acme**, meaning skin eruption. **Common acne is acne vulgaris.**

Acne is a problem for most adolescents, although it can occur at any age. Acne cuts across all barriers of race, age, culture and gender. Acne most often occurs on the face but can occur on other areas too. You can often find acne on the chest, back, shoulders and upper arms.

There are many different forms of acne, including blackheads, whiteheads and swollen nodules or pimples, showing as reddish bumps, boil- like swellings, or pus-filled bumps. Sometimes, acne occurs singly, without any additional cysts.

**Hormonal disturbances during the teenage years are the main cause of acne.** Acne usually vanishes once you reach your twenties. For some, the misery continues beyond the teen years, in the form of scars. Acne can also occur because of your genetic make-up. Acne can lower your self-esteem, as you tend to feel inferior due to your physical appearance.

It is impossible to avoid acne, although you can try to keep tabs on it and prevent major eruptions. Simple remedies and solutions abound, such as:

- eating a healthy diet,
- using water-based cosmetics,
- washing your face with non-irritating soap,

- avoid touching acne or other facial eruptions with your hands and spreading infection further.

These simple methods may help you to keep a check on the further spread of acne.

Regular treatments can provide relief from acne. Use acne cream or ice to lessen the inflammation due to acne. Most medications, creams, and acne liquids contain benzyl peroxide. This kills the bacteria present in acne and dries up your skin. Simple acne can be relieved with many home remedies, but you need to consult a dermatologist for severe acne.

## Part-II: Understanding Acne

### 2. What is Acne?

Pimples! We have all experienced those nasty, painful blots on our faces as teenagers, varying in size from the ultra-small and almost unnoticeable, to the big, attention-grabbing ones!

Pimples appear at all the wrong places, at equally wrong times. They invariably appear at the tip of our nose the night of the first date or the school prom. However, the outbreak of pimples is episodic, not continual. They merely require a few years of endurance and a lot of patience before disappearing altogether from our lives, remaining just an interesting part of the memories of our adolescent years.

However, there is another skin condition which is similar in some ways to that disorder, but more severe in its appearance. It occurs on various parts of the body besides the face, and is much more difficult to cure. It can appear at any time during a person’s life, although the disorder most often begins in adolescence. This dermatological condition is called **Acne**.

This book will, hopefully, give you the answers to all your questions, including:

- What is acne?
- What are the various forms of acne?
- How can you treat each of these disorders?
- What causes acne?

It will focus especially on the most severe forms of acne and the symptoms, and provide a comprehensive guide to the various treatment options available.

Whether you are an anxious teenager, a forty-year old patient or a worried parent, the in-depth information on the condition will reduce your fears and help you negotiate your way through the worries that come with acne.

### **Definition of Acne**

Acne is one of the most common skin disorders worldwide. It occurs on almost 45% teenagers and adults, and is seen in a smaller percentage of young children. Pimples, blackheads, whiteheads and lesions appear in the various oil-producing areas of the body; the face, back, chest, neck, shoulders and upper arms.

The main reason for this is an over-production of oil by the sebaceous glands in the skin. This causes the oil to combine with dead skin cells, which clogs the pores in that area. Scientists are focusing on the roles played by hormones, bacteria and genes that can increase the risk of developing acne.

Acne exists in several forms, including *acne vulgaris*, *acne fulminans* and *acne conglobata*. Each differs in its cause, severity and prognosis. Some forms cannot be successfully treated but most acne is completely curable.

With the wide range of treatment options available today, ranging from topical ointments to surgical procedures, the best treatment depends upon the type and severity of the condition. Non-prescription drugs, such as topical medications, may cure some forms but oral medications or even surgery may be required for others.

Patients with moderate to severe acne must consult with a qualified doctor or a dermatologist who will help them to decide the most suitable treatment combinations for them.

### 3. Who Develops Acne?

Acne affects millions of people all over the world. The statistical distribution of the condition, by age and gender is:

- 1 85% of adolescents and pre-adolescents are affected by acne.
- 2 The condition occurs on some children under 10 years of age.
- 3 Boys are more likely to have a severe form of the disease than teenage girls.
- 4 About 12% of women between 22 and 45 years of age are affected by acne.
- 5 About 3% of all men are affected during their adult life.
- 6 Women are more prone to acne during adulthood because of premenstrual hormonal changes as well as consistent use of cosmetics.
- 7 The incidences of acne reduce sharply after the age of 45.

## 4. What is the Real Cause of Acne?

For most people, acne begins during adolescence. One of the main reasons is the excessive production of sebum due to the higher levels of sex hormones in the body during puberty.

To understand the various factors which cause acne, we need a brief insight into the anatomy of the skin surface; the hair follicles, as well as the production and role of sebum.

Here is some background before we get to the actual causes.

### *The Hair Follicle and the Sebaceous Glands*

There are many hair follicles on our skin. The sebaceous glands (oil glands) exist near the surface of the skin and open into the hair follicles. The oil, or sebum, which they produce constantly, enters the follicle. This helps in protecting the skin from drying out.

Overproduction of sebum is a major factor in the development of acne. Before covering the various causes of acne, here is information about the production, role and regulation of sebum.

### **Sebum**

Sebum, an oily and complex mixture of lipids (a group of fats and similar compounds including waxes, oils, sterols, triglycerides, phosphatides and phospholipids), is produced by the sebaceous glands.

Sebaceous glands exist over almost all of the body, but especially on the forehead, chin and back. Cells in these glands disintegrate in about a week and produce sebum. The rate of production depends on age and gender:

- 1 Adult females produce less sebum than adult males
- 2 Production of sebum increases almost five times in boys with the onset of puberty

- 3 Sebum production declines significantly with age
- 4 Production of sebum also falls steeply in women after menopause

### ***Hormonal control of sebum***

The sex hormones, or androgens, stimulate the cells in the sebaceous glands to produce sebum.

The testis in males, the ovaries in females and the adrenal glands produce these hormones.

The androgens that influence the production of sebum the most are:

- 1 5-testosterone (DHT)
- 2 5-androstene-3 $\beta$ -diol

### ***Role of Sebum***

Some of the functions of sebum are:

- 1 It acts as a protective barrier against bacteria and fungi.
- 2 It helps to reduce excessive water loss from the surface of the skin.

It is an environment that supports the bacteria *Propionibacterium acnes*, which researchers believe may play an important role in the regulation of the immune system.

With your new insight into the working of sebaceous glands and the production of sebum, you will understand the factors that cause acne more easily.

## Why Do We Get Acne?

Acne develops when the sebaceous glands in a person's skin start producing excessive levels of sebum. This oil combines with the cells lining the walls of the glands and clog the skin's pores, plugging them. This plug can enlarge and rupture the hair follicle, so that the follicle spills the oil and debris on to the skin. This causes inflammation and swelling.

Various factors can cause an increase in the production of sebum, including:

**Hormones:** There is a sudden surge in the level of hormones at puberty. These hormones react with the skin to form *dihydrotestosterone*, or *DHT*, which makes the sebaceous glands increase in size. It also stimulates these glands to increase the production of sebum. The increase in sebum leads to the plugging of hair follicles, which eventually leads to the development of acne.

**Hormones in Women:** At puberty, an increase in the production of estrogen results in menses. The menstrual cycle results from changes in the levels of estrogen. The severity of acne differs as she goes through her monthly cycle.

**Bacteria in acne:** *Propionibacterium acnes* are bacteria found commonly on the surface of the skin, as well as in pimples. With the onset of puberty, the bacteria increase. Other types of bacteria, such as *Propionibacterium granulosum* and *Staphylococcus epidermidis* can also be found at this time. It has been found that people with an excessive production of sebum have more bacteria on their skin, but the link between bacteria and acne has not been discovered yet.

**Medications:** Acne can sometimes occur as a reaction to a particular drug. This type of acne typically clears up as soon as the medication is discontinued.

**Pregnancy:** Pregnant women usually develop acne, due to a rise in the levels of hormones in their body. However, their acne clears up soon after the birth of the baby. Newborn babies have acne at times as well. This can be due to the stress of birth or because some hormones from the mother may have permeated the umbilical cord and passed to the baby.



**Endocrine disorders:** Less frequently, acne is found in young children and old people. This could be due to a rare disorder of their endocrine system.

**Genes:** Researchers have found evidence that genes may play a vital role in causing acne. It has been found that children whose parents had acne in their childhood are much more likely to develop acne. In addition, the severity of their acne was similar to the severity of their parents' acne.

**Hypersensitivity to *P. acnes*:** Acne fulminans, an extremely severe form of acne, can be caused due to a body's hypersensitivity to the bacteria *P. acnes*.

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