

# Arvada Pediatric Associates, p.c.



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## ACNE

### DEFINITION:

- Blackheads, whiteheads (pimples), or red bumps
- Face, neck, and shoulders involved
- Occurs during adolescent and young adult years
- Larger red lumps are quite painful

### CAUSE:

Acne is due to plugging of the oil glands and by certain bacteria on the skin. More than 90% of teenagers have some acne. The main cause of acne is increased levels of hormones during adolescence. It is not caused by diet such as fried foods, chocolate, or any other food, although an overall healthy diet may improve overall skin health. Acne is not caused by dirt or not washing the face often enough. The tops of blackheads are black because of the chemical reaction of the oil plug with the air.

### EXPECTED COURSE:

Acne usually lasts until 20 or 25 years of age. It is rare for acne to leave any scars, but if you are developing any scarring contact your physician for a more thorough evaluation.

**HOME TREATMENT:** There is no magic medicine at this time that will cure acne. However, good skin care can keep acne under control and at a mild level.

### Basic Treatment for All Acne:

- Soap: The skin should be washed twice each day and after exercise. The most important time is before bedtime. A mild soap such as Dove or Cetaphil should be used. Never scrub the skin with any abrasive soap or device; this will make acne worse.
- Hair: The hair should be shampooed daily. Hair can make acne worse by friction if it is too long. Consider wearing long hair in a ponytail for sleep. Certain oils from hair and skin left on a pillow may aggravate acne. Consider placing a clean towel over the pillow at night or washing pillowcases every few days.
- Avoid picking. Picking keeps acne from healing and spreads bacteria from the hands to the skin.

**Treatment for Pimples:** Pimples are infected oil glands. They should be treated with the following:

- Benzoyl peroxide 5% lotion or gel. This lotion helps to open pimples and unplug blackheads, and it also kills bacteria. It is available without a prescription. Ask your pharmacist to recommend a brand. The lotion should be applied daily at bedtime. In redheads and African Americans it should be applied every other day initially. An amount the size of a pea should cover most of the face. If the skin becomes red or peels, you are using too much of the medicine or applying it too often, so slow down. This lotion may be needed for several years.
- Pimple opening: In general, it is better not to "pop" pimples but teenagers do it anyway. Therefore, do it safely. Never open a pimple before it has come to a head. Wash your face and hands first. Use a sterile needle (sterilized by alcohol or a flame). Nick the surface of the yellow pimple with the tip of the needle. Pus should run out without squeezing. Wipe away the pus and wash the area with soap and water. Scarring will not result from opening small pimples, but it can result from squeezing boils or other large, red, tender lumps.

**Treatment for Blackheads (Comedones):** Blackheads are the plugs found in blocked-off oil glands. They should be treated with the following:

- Benzoyl peroxide: This agent is also excellent for removing thickened skin that blocks the openings to oil glands. It should be used as described above for treating pimples.
- Blackhead extractor: Blackheads that are a cosmetic problem can sometimes be removed with a blackhead extractor. This instrument costs about \$1 and is available at any drugstore. By placing the hole in the end of the small metal spoon directly over the blackhead, uniform pressure can be applied that does not hurt the normal skin. This method is much more efficient than anything you can accomplish with your fingers. Soak your face with a warm washcloth before you try to remove blackheads. If the blackhead does not come out the first time, leave it alone.

**Treatment for Red Bumps:** Large red bumps mean the infection has spread beyond the oil gland. If you have several red bumps, you probably also need an antibiotic. Antibiotics come as solutions for the skin or pills and must be obtained from a physician during an office visit.

#### **Common Mistakes in Treating Acne:**

- Avoid scrubbing the skin. Hard scrubbing of the skin is harmful because it irritates the openings of the oil glands and can cause them to secrete excess oil.
- Avoid applying any oily or greasy substances to the face. They make acne worse by blocking off oil glands. If you must use cover-up cosmetics, use water-based ones and wash them off at bedtime.
- Avoid hair tonics or hair creams (especially greasy ones). With sweating, these will spread to the face and aggravate the acne.
- Don't stop your acne medicine too soon. It takes 8 weeks to see a good response.

#### **CALL OUR OFFICE**

##### **During regular hours if:**

- It looks infected (large, red, tender lump).
- Acne is not improved after treating it with Benzoyl peroxide for 2 months
- Benzoyl peroxide makes the face itchy or swollen.
- You have other concerns or questions.

(Revised 4/07)