

Acne

Acne is a skin condition where your pores or hair follicles become clogged with oil and dead skin cells. These clogged pores can appear on your face, neck, back, chest and shoulders. The difference between having a few pimples and an acne diagnosis is that acne can be persistent and take a long time to heal. Often, new pimples appear while the old ones are still healing. Acne is most common among teens, where hormones play a role, but adults can have it too, and even infants. Acne can cause emotional distress, especially when it doesn't respond to treatment and regularly recurs.

Acne includes a wide range of issues and blockage types, including blackheads, whiteheads, lesions, pimples, nodules and cysts.

1. **Blackheads** are open but clearly clogged pores that have a dark center. These are blockages that have made their way to the surface and when the oil makes contact with the air, the blockage turns dark.

2. **Whiteheads** are hair follicles that are blocked and bulge. They form a cap, as it were, that is white. Whiteheads occur below the skin.

3. **Papules** are another typical acne lesion. These are just small bumps on the skin, usually pinkish in color, but tender to the touch.

4. **Pimples**, whose medical name is pustules, are papules that are now topped with pus. Pimples usually have visible red inflammation in the surrounding skin.

5. **Nodules** are clogs deep beneath the skin. These do not have a "head," as a blackhead, whitehead or pimple would. They are painful, larger than pimples and solid to the touch.

6. **Cysts** are also deep beneath the skin, but are filled with pus and can leave scars.

There are different levels of severity of acne, which has to do with how clogged the pores are and how many clogged pores you have:

Mild acne is the most common and includes having blackheads and/or whiteheads. If you only have a few clogged pores, or they are in an isolated spot, your acne is "mild."

Moderate acne means there are more pimples than blackheads or whiteheads. With this type of acne, you might also notice that some of your pimples have red skin or inflammation around them.

Acne is labeled **severe** when you have nothing but pimples, both those that are small bumps and those that are yellowish and filled with pus. In addition, severe acne sometimes includes nodules or cysts.

Symptoms: The Obvious and the Subtle

While acne symptoms are typically hard-to-miss eruptions on the skin, as outlined above, there are other symptoms that many acne sufferers experience:

Dark spots on the skin are common with acne. They can fade, but it can take months or years for them to do so.

Low self-esteem often comes with acne. You might feel anxious or worried about how you look, and self-conscious about the lesions on your face. These feelings are normal and your doctor should be able to help you through that part of acne as well.

Depression is low self-esteem taken further until it becomes a serious medical condition. Depression can lead to dark and suicidal thoughts. If you have dark or suicidal thoughts, you should contact your New York City doctor, therapist or a person you trust, immediately.

Causes

There are four main causes that New York City dermatologists look at when examining you for an acne diagnosis:

- oil production
- dead skin cells
- clogged pores
- bacteria

In addition, hormones are typically taken into account as well. During puberty, males hormones increase in both boys and girls. Infants can have acne as a result of their hormones being unsettled after birth and some women find that when they go through menopause, they have acne even if they didn't have it as a teen. In all of these instances, changing hormones are present.

Certain medications that you may need to be on for other, non-skin-related diagnoses can cause acne as a side effect. Make sure you tell your Manhattan dermatologist all of the medications that you are currently taking so your doctor can tell you if any of them are causing the acne. A change in medication may be all that's needed.

While there is a lot of controversy surrounding the theory of diet impacting acne, those theories persist. Chocolate is one food that is often thought to make acne worse, although it bears pointing out that there are no studies to support this theory, it's just a suspicion. Other suspects include dairy products and carbohydrates.

Stress is known to impact your body in many ways and acne is no exception. Many people find that their acne flares up when their stress is high.

What DOESN'T Cause Acne

Just like chocolate, greasy foods have long been eyed when trying to determine causes of acne. Eating greasy food does not in fact cause acne nor does it impact how much oil your skin produces. Preparing greasy food, however, can cause skin issues as grease often flares up out of vats and pans, getting on your skin and causing irritation.

Dirty skin doesn't cause acne either. Please do not scrub your skin because of this mistaken belief. Using harsh skin cleansers or scrubbing at your skin can, actually, make the acne worse.

Cosmetics on their own don't cause acne either, especially if you look out for and use cosmetics labeled "noncomedogenic," which means they don't have oil in them to contribute to the oil on your skin. Just make sure to remove your make up every night before bed, that is the healthiest thing you can do for your skin.

Treating Acne

The general rule of thumb is that the earlier you start treatment, the less likely you are to have scars.

While there are many over the counter face washes and skin treatments that can help acne, if you have used any of them for several weeks or more with no improvement, it may be time to see a dermatologist. Your New York City dermatologist will work with you to control the acne you may already have, help you to avoid scarring your skin and if you've already developed acne, he should have suggestions for making scars less noticeable.

You have several options available to you. Your Manhattan dermatologist should go over each of them in detail. Depending on the severity of your acne, he will guide you through treatment options that are best for you and your body. There are four general options when looking to treat acne:

1. Topical medications will probably be the first line of defense. Your doctor can recommend over the counter lotions or creams, or write a prescription for you. Topical treatments typically contain either retinoids, antibiotics or dapsone.

2. Oral medications are another route to take, especially when the acne is not responding to topical medications. Your choices for oral medications include antibiotics, to control inflammation and bacteria growth, combined oral contraceptives, an anti-androgen agent or the drug isotretinoin. Your NYC dermatologist will be able to explain what each of these do and what the risks are for you.

3. Sometimes, other therapies may be suggested, such as light therapy, chemical peels, whitehead and blackhead extractions, or steroid injections.

4. Acne scars can be treated by any of the following:

Soft Tissue Fillers

Chemical Peels

Dermabrasion

Laser Resurfacing

Light Therapy

Skin Surgery

Some acne treatments your New York dermatologist may suggest can have serious side effects. Be sure you are prepared when you go to see your dermatologist, bringing with you a list of questions so you can pick the best possible treatment for you.