

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from acne (spots). It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Useful facts

What is acne?

Acne tends to start at puberty and leads to greasy skin and 'spots'. People may feel bad about themselves because of the way their skin looks, often at a time when they are already vulnerable.

How common is acne?

You are not alone – acne affects 8 out of 10 teenagers to some degree, and more frequently boys. Around one in three teenagers have acne bad enough to need treatment. In women and girls, acne is more common around the time of their monthly periods.

What causes it?

Acne is caused by inflamed skin glands on your face and upper trunk, often made worse by bacteria in the skin. In rare cases, acne may be caused by an underlying medical condition, such as polycystic ovary disease (PCO) or other hormonal disorders. It's a myth that stress or certain foods (such as chocolate) cause acne – and acne is certainly not due to a lack of cleanliness!

What can I expect to happen?

Duration

Acne is a long-term condition that may need immediate treatment for treating severely affected skin, and maintenance therapy to keep spots from recurring. In seven out of ten people, acne stops within five years – but some people experience skin problems lasting into their 20s and, rarely, longer.

Severity

Acne can vary from being mild and localised to severe and widespread.

Impact on your life

Acne can severely affect people's quality of life, regardless of how bad it is.

Tests

You won't need any tests unless your doctor suspects an underlying medical cause.

What can I do to get myself better - now and in the future?

Washing

Wash your face only once or twice a day with lukewarm water. Avoid strong or abrasive soaps and excessive scrubbing. Be aware that hot water and rough flannels can make symptoms worse rather than better.

Avoid squeezing

No matter how tempting, try not to squeeze acne spots, as this may cause scarring.

Over the counter creams, gels and lotions

Effective treatments are available to reduce and improve spots. They can also prevent or reduce scarring if started early. Ask your pharmacist for advice on available preparations. You need to continue treatment for at least six weeks before seeing any changes. If a treatment is effective, continue for at least four to six months. You may need to try different preparations until you find one that suits you. Some treatments may irritate your skin initially, so seek advice from your pharmacist if this is the case.

When should I seek medical help?

Seek advice from your pharmacist or GP if initial treatment with over the counter preparations doesn't work for you, if acne significantly impairs your quality of life, or if any of the following warning symptoms are present:

Severity

Your acne is really bad and you feel physically unwell because of it.

Pain

You develop painful spots that feel 'deep' in your skin.

Distress

You get distressed by your acne, and/or it affects your social life.

Scarring

You notice the beginning of scarring despite treatment.

Possible underlying medical causes

You suspect that you may have an underlying medical condition that causes your acne – for example, if you have additional symptoms such as infrequent or absent periods, excessive hair growth, or hair loss.

Where can I find out more?

Visit the NHS website (<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Acne/Pages/Introduction.asp>) for more information on how you can treat and prevent acne. Remember that your pharmacist can also help you with assessing your symptoms and can advise on suitable treatments.

A reminder about Coronavirus

Main symptoms

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature).
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Most people with coronavirus have at least 1 of these symptoms.

What to do if you have symptoms

If you have any of the main symptoms of coronavirus:

1. Get a test to check if you have coronavirus as soon as possible.
2. Stay at home and do not have visitors until you get your test result – only leave your home to have a test.

Visit NHS .UK:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

Here you will find the latest advice on symptoms, how to book a test and advice on when and how long you, your household and your 'bubble' need to isolate

Contacting your GP

Acne is not a sign of coronavirus, but it's still important to get help from a GP if you need it.

To contact your GP surgery:

- visit their website
- use the NHS App
- call them

Find out about using the NHS during coronavirus:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/social-distancing/using-the-nhs-and-other-health-services/>