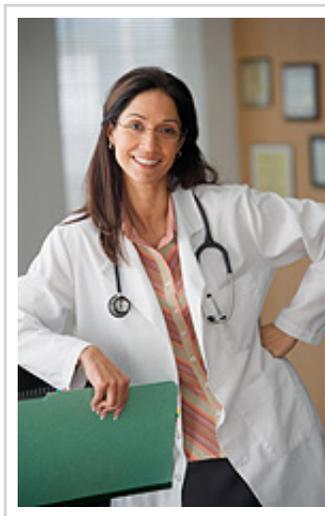


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What's up with my acne, doc?



Most people will get pimples at some point in their life. But, when is it time to put aside your drugstore remedies and seek professional help?

When to bring in the big guns

Acne is the term used for blackheads, whiteheads, pimples and cysts that occur on the face, neck, back, chest and shoulders. While acne mainly affects teenagers, zits don't discriminate—they can rear their ugly head in adults of any age. Acne is by no means a life-threatening condition, but it can affect your self-esteem and can cause long-term scarring.

What can be more upsetting than the physical effects of acne are the psychological ones, which, like the condition itself, vary from person to

person.

"Some people may have, what I would consider, awful acne, but it doesn't bother them. There are other people who get one pimple and they are totally distraught over it," says Peter Vignjevic, an assistant clinical professor of Dermatology at McMaster University in Hamilton.

You might feel silly going to the doctor for help with your acne, especially if you've been told that it's just a part of growing up or that you'll grow out of it. However, acne shouldn't be shrugged off as an insignificant part of adolescence, like bad clothes and terrible music can be, especially if it's causing you stress.

Here are some factors to consider when deciding if it's time to show your face to a physician:

- Do you try to hide your face because your acne embarrasses you?
- Are you shy because you have acne?
- Are you less optimistic about life since you developed acne?
- Are over-the-counter products inefficient or ineffective in treating your acne?
- Are you starting to see scars?

If you answered "yes" to any of those questions, you may want to see your doctor or dermatologist.

Prep for the exam

Your doctor will ask you some questions about your acne, how you currently treat your pimples and if you have any other health concerns. Remember, these folks deal with acne and more severe conditions daily so you shouldn't be embarrassed.

Your doctor will likely explain your treatment options, and depending on the severity of your acne they may recommend one, or a combination of, the following:

Topical retinoids (creams): These work by unblocking pores and helping the skin with healthy exfoliation. This will prevent pores from getting blocked in the future.

Antimicrobial treatments (gel, wash): These products prevent bacteria growth in blocked pores, which reduces the redness and pus.

Hormone treatment (oral contraceptive pills): Birth control pills help stabilize fluctuating hormones and in turn, control excessive oil production. But, they can only be taken by females. Sorry boys!

Oral retinoids (pills): These types of pills are normally used for severe acne. They treat multiple factors that cause your acne and are prescribed by a doctor or dermatologist.

All of these treatments will take time for you to see results, so don't expect to wake up the following day pimple-free. Most products will take anywhere from one to two months before you start seeing results. That may not be as quick as you were hoping for, but it sure beats treating your acne like a bad fashion craze—simply waiting for it pass.