



Please note that the information contained in this document is intended as general guidance purposes only.
For more information visit the Acne Support website: www.acnesupport.org.uk

Guide to Acne Types

Blackheads

When oil, dead skin cells and other debris continue to add to a blockage in a hair follicle then the blockage will grow and become visible. If this larger blockage is located near the surface of the hair follicle it will breach the follicle opening, or pore, and protrude out onto the surface of the skin.

Oxygen will then react with pigment in the oil, causing the blockage to turn a dark colour. This type of blockage is known as a blackhead.

Whiteheads

When oil, dead skin cells and other debris continue to add to a blockage in a hair follicle then the blockage will grow and become visible. If this larger blockage is located deeper down in the hair follicle it will force the opening of the hair follicle, to close around it. This is known as a whitehead.

The term whitehead is often misused to refer to an acne lesion known as a pustule. In actual whiteheads, there is no inflammation or pus.

Solar Comedones

A form of acne known as 'solar comedones' can form on areas of skin that have received relatively high levels of exposure to the sun, such as the cheeks. This type of acne often appears only in the middle-aged and elderly and can be made up of whiteheads, blackheads or a combination of both.

Pustules and Papules

Papules form when bacteria multiplies within a blocked hair follicle. As debris continue to add to a blockage and it grows, there is a risk that the blockage will tear the follicle wall. Follicle walls can also tear when a whitehead or a blackhead is squeezed or picked at.

When a follicle walls tears, white blood cells rush in to fight the bacteria, causing inflammation. The white blood cells then cluster and form a pocket of pus, this is known as a papule. Pustules normally form a few days after a papule as the pocket of pus rises to the surface of the inflammation.

Nodules and Cysts

Acne nodules and cysts are generic terms that are used to refer to particularly large papules or pustules.

Nodules and cysts can take a long time to heal if left untreated. If you think that you might have an acne nodule or cyst then it is advised that you see your doctor, who can inform you of the best treatment options.

Acne Vulgaris

Acne can occur as a single spot or as a variety of the lesions described on this page spread over an area of skin. When a person has multiple lesions, be it the same type of lesion or a mixture of types, spread over an area of skin it is known as acne vulgaris (with the vulgaris meaning 'common').