



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 Treatment

In this guide you will find details of the acne treatments that are available. Acne is often a chronic condition, meaning that if you have acne prone skin you will probably suffer from acne outbreaks from time to time. However, with the right treatments you will likely be able to prevent outbreaks and effectively manage them when they do occur.

It is important to treat acne as soon as possible, as delaying treatment can result in the acne worsening and an increased likelihood of scarring. You may have to try several treatments before you discover what treatment, or combinations of treatments, work best for you. Knowing what causes your acne may help you to select a more effective treatment, so please visit our 'causes' page for further details or speak to your GP.

Speak to a doctor or pharmacist if you are thinking of using different acne treatments at the same time. Most acne treatments take time to work, so unless you have side effects that mean you need to stop using the treatment early, you may need to continue using it for at least 12 weeks before deciding whether it has been effective.

Please note that over the counter treatments, meaning ones that you don't need a prescription for, are unlikely to be effective against severe acne. That is acne that consists of many lesions (e.g. spots) covering an area and is often scarring.

If you have acne that has lasted for several weeks and is getting worse, is leaving scars or is affecting your mental health then you should arrange to visit your GP.

Please note that when a treatment is categorised as being 'prescribed' or 'over the counter' this reflects how they are commonly dispensed. There is also the procedural category, which includes treatments such as laser therapies, chemical peels, and steroid injections. These should be performed by a trained professional.

Over the counter treatments

Tea Tree Oil

What is tea tree oil?

Tea tree oil is an essential oil that can be used as an acne treatment.

If you are considering using tea tree oil as an acne treatment, you should buy it in a product that is designed to be applied to the skin and not just the raw oil itself, as raw tea tree oil can also be a skin irritant.

How does tea tree oil work?

Tea tree oil acts as an anti-inflammatory. It tends to work slower than the anti-inflammatory known as benzoyl peroxide, but it has less risk of irritating the skin.

Tea tree oil is also an anti-bacterial and can work to kill acne-related bacteria.

What are some of the side effects of tea tree oil?

Side effects of tea tree oil include itchy, reddened and swollen skin. Please see your product details for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using tea tree oil

As with most acne treatments, tea tree oil takes time to work and you should allow for twelve weeks of use before determining whether the product has worked for you. Tea tree oil is not likely to be effective for severe acne, which usually needs treatment from a healthcare professional.

Zinc

What is zinc?

Zinc is a mineral that can be used as an acne treatment.

Zinc can be found in topical treatments that are applied directly to the skin or as oral supplements, which are taken by mouth. It is advisable to speak to your healthcare provider before taking oral zinc supplements to ensure that there aren't any health risks.

How does zinc work?

Zinc is an anti-inflammatory and can reduce the swelling and redness caused by acne. It can also help to reduce acne-causing oil production, although it is less likely to be effective in more severe cases of acne.

What are some of the side effects of zinc?

Side effects of zinc if taken orally include nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Side effects of zinc if used in a topical treatment include burning, itching, stinging and skin irritation. Please see your product details for full instructions and warnings. If you are thinking of taking oral zinc supplements talk to your doctor first to make sure that there aren't any health concerns.

General guidance on using zinc

As with most acne treatments, zinc takes time to work and you should allow for twelve weeks of use before determining whether the product has worked for you.

Niacinamide

What is niacinamide?

Niacinamide is vitamin B3, also known as nicotinamide.

Niacinamide can be found in topical treatments that are applied directly to the skin. Oral niacinamide supplements may also prove helpful in the treatment of acne.

How does niacinamide work?

Niacinamide is an anti-inflammatory that works to reduce the swelling and redness associated with acne. It also works to regulate the amount of acne-causing oil being produced by the glands in your skin. In addition, it regulates skin tone and can help to fade the red, purple and brown marks that acne can leave on the skin.

What are some of the side effects of niacinamide?

Side effects of oral niacinamide supplements include skin flushing, nausea and diarrhoea. Side effects of topical niacinamide treatments includes skin irritation. Please see your product details for full instructions and warnings. If you are thinking of taking oral niacinamide supplements talk to your healthcare provider first to make sure that there aren't any health concerns. You must not take niacinamide treatments or take niacinamide supplements if you are pregnant.

General guidance on using niacinamide

As with most acne treatments, niacinamide takes time to work and you should allow for twelve weeks of use before determining whether the product has worked for you.

It is not advised that you continue to use niacinamide once your acne has healed as there is little evidence to suggest that it will help in preventing your acne from returning. However, topical niacinamide may help to reduce the skin discolouration, such as red and brown patches, that is left by acne.

Retinols

What are retinols?

Retinols are a form of acne treatment that is derived from vitamin A. They are often labelled in products as retinaldehyde or retinyl palmitate.

Retinols are not the same as retinoids, which are stronger treatments – you can learn about retinoids here.

Retinols come in topical treatments, which are applied directly to the skin, are often available as creams and gels in 0.1% to 1% concentrations.

How do retinols work?

Retinols work to promote the growth of new skin cells whilst breaking down dead skin cells and other debris that may be trapped in the hair follicle. They also work to regulate the amount of keratin being produced by your skin and prevent dead skin cells from sticking together and forming acne-causing blockages.

In addition, retinols can regulate skin tone and reduce the red, purple and brown colouring that acne can leave on the skin.

What are some of the side effects of retinols?

Retinols can cause irritation to the skin, to reduce this risk you should gradually introduce retinols to your skin by using the treatment a few days a week before slowly increasing to daily use. Retinols can also make your skin more sensitive to the sun, meaning that they should be applied at night and that a non-oily sunscreen should be used during the day whilst treatment is ongoing. Further side effects of retinols include skin redness, dryness and peeling. Please see your product details for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using retinols?

As with most acne treatments, retinols take time to work and you should allow for twelve weeks of use before determining whether the product has worked for you. It can be advisable to continue to use retinols (if they have proven effective) even after your acne symptoms have improved. The skin sheds its top layer every twenty-eight days and acne problems may reoccur if the treatment has been stopped. You should speak to your healthcare provider before you decide to keep using retinols after your acne has healed.

Alpha-Hydroxy Acids

What is an alpha-hydroxy acid?

Alpha-hydroxy acids, such as glycolic and lactobionic acid, are chemical exfoliators. Exfoliating is a way of removing acne blockages that have already formed within your hair follicles, such as whiteheads and blackheads. It is also a way of removing trapped skin cells, oil, cosmetics and other follicle-blocking substances from your skin, reducing your risk of developing acne in the future.

Examples of alpha-hydroxy acids include glycolic, mandelic, citric, lactic, lactobionic and tartaric. They are commonly found in 2% to 10% concentrations in products that you leave on the skin and in higher concentrations in products that you wash off the skin.

Lactobionic acid is a gentler chemical exfoliator and is not as likely to cause skin irritation as other alpha-hydroxy acids and salicylic acid. However, it tends to be less effective and does not perform as well in reducing acne-associated skin discolouration.

How do alpha-hydroxy acids work?

Alpha-hydroxy acids work by penetrating the skin and breaking-up acne-causing blockages. They do not penetrate as deeply as salicylic acid, although they can be more effective at reducing pigmentation (skin colouring) and therefore are sometimes better at removing the red, purple and brown colouring on the skin that comes with acne.

What are some of the side effects of using alpha-hydroxy acids?

Side effects of alpha-hydroxy acids include burning, redness and general skin irritation. To help reduce the risk of side effects, apply products for just a few days a week. Alpha-hydroxy acids can also cause your skin to become more sensitive to the sun and it is advisable to use a non-oily sunscreen every day while treatment is ongoing. Please see your product's details for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using alpha-hydroxy acids

Most acne treatments take time to work so you will most likely be told to continue the treatment for at least twelve weeks before deciding whether or not it has worked for you. It is also advised that you continue to exfoliate even after your acne symptoms have improved whilst your skin is still acne prone. The skin sheds its top layer every twenty-eight days and acne problems may reoccur if the treatment has been stopped.

As you may have read in the section on salicylic acid, alpha-hydroxy acids are often recommended for use in conjunction with salicylic acid, applying one in the morning and the other at night. However, with all acne treatments, you should speak to a doctor or pharmacist before trying more than one at a time.

Vitamin A

What is vitamin A?

Vitamin A is one of the vitamins that can be used as an acne. Vitamin A is available as oral tablets. If you are thinking of taking vitamin A supplements you should talk to your healthcare provider first to ensure that there aren't any health risks.

Vitamin A in itself is generally not as effective as other vitamin A-based acne treatments, such as retinols and retinoids.

How does vitamin A work?

Vitamin A encourages the growth of new skin cells whilst breaking down dead skin cells. It can also regulate the amount of keratin being produced by your skin and prevent dead skin cells from sticking together and forming acne-causing blockages in hair follicles.

In addition, vitamin A can regulate skin tone and reduce the red, purple and brown colouring that acne can leave on the skin. It can also reduce the size and productivity of your oil glands, meaning that your skin produces less acne-causing oil.

What are some of the side effects of using vitamin A?

Vitamin A can make your skin more sensitive to the sun, meaning that a non-oily sunscreen should be used whilst treatment is ongoing. Further side effects of vitamin A include skin irritation, dryness and peeling, vomiting, diarrhoea, liver complications and hair loss. Please see your product details for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using vitamin A

As with most acne treatments, vitamin A takes time to work and you should allow for twelve weeks of use before determining whether or not the product has worked for you. It is also advised that you continue to use vitamin A (if it has proven effective) even after your acne symptoms have improved. The skin sheds its top layer every twenty-eight days and acne problems may reoccur if the treatment has been stopped.

Salicylic Acid

What is salicylic acid?

Salicylic acid is a beta-hydroxy acid that acts as a 'chemical exfoliator'. Exfoliating is a way of removing acne blockages that have already formed within your hair follicles, such as whiteheads and blackheads. It is also a way of removing trapped skin cells, oil, cosmetics and other follicle-blocking substances from your skin, which can help prevent more spots forming. 'Chemical exfoliators' are ones where the chemical ingredients of the product, such as acids, exfoliate the skin, whereas 'mechanical exfoliators', such as scrubs and brushes, use friction to exfoliate the skin – you can learn more about mechanical exfoliators here.

Salicylic acid is commonly found in 2% concentrations in over-the-counter products and is often available in creams, masks and pads.

How does salicylic acid work?

Salicylic acid works by penetrating the hair follicle and oil gland and dissolving the acne-causing blockages of dead skin cells, oil and other debris. It also works to reduce the amount of oil being produced by your oil glands, making it less likely that new acne-causing blockages will form or grow bigger.

One of the main benefits of salicylic acid is that it can penetrate deeper into your hair follicles than other chemical exfoliators to remove blockages and regulate oil production.

Salicylic also has some anti-inflammatory properties, helping to reduce the swelling and redness that comes with acne. In addition, it can help reduce the shedding of skin cells lining the hair follicle wall, resulting in fewer blockages.

What are some of the side effects of using salicylic acid?

Side effects of salicylic acid include burning, redness and general skin irritation. To help reduce the risk of side effects, start by applying a salicylic acid treatment for a just a few days a week. Salicylic acid can also cause your skin to become more sensitive to the sun so use a non-oily sunscreen during the day. Salicylic acid must not be used if you are pregnant. Please see your product details for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using salicylic acid

It is important to remember that most acne treatments take time to work. Doctors usually suggest that you continue the treatment for at least twelve weeks before deciding whether or not it has worked for you. It is also often advised that you continue to exfoliate even after your acne symptoms have improved if your skin is still prone to acne blemishes. The skin sheds its top layer every twenty-eight days and acne problems may come back if the treatment has been stopped too soon.

You may be advised to use salicylic acid in conjunction with an alpha-hydroxy acid, such as glycolic acid, applying one in the morning and the other at night, as both provide different benefits. Please remember that using more than one chemical exfoliant should always be carried out under the supervision of your doctor.

Scrubs and exfoliating brushes

What are scrubs and exfoliating brushes?

Scrubs and exfoliating brushes are acne treatments that are available over the counter, without having to see a doctor or nurse.

Scrubs and exfoliating brushes are mechanical exfoliators, meaning that they work by physical contact as opposed to chemical reaction. Exfoliating is a way of removing whiteheads and blackheads, trapped skin cells, oil, cosmetics and other follicle-blocking substances from your skin.

How do scrubs and exfoliating brushes work?

There are many brands of face and body scrubs available and they all largely work in the same way, through small particles. The idea is that the movement of these small particles over the skin will physically break down any trapped skin cells, oil or debris and remove it. Exfoliating brushes work in the same way, with the movement of the bristles sweeping away trapped debris.

Mechanical exfoliation generally doesn't reach as deeply into hair follicles as chemical exfoliation. You can try steaming your skin (which means exposing your skin to a safe temperature of steam, using an appliance such as face steamer) prior to exfoliating with a scrub or a brush, as this will loosen the blockages in your hair follicles.

What are some of the side effects of using scrubs and exfoliating brushes?

One of the side effects of using scrubs or exfoliating brushes can be irritated skin. It is advised that you don't scrub your skin harshly as this will only damage the skin and leave it sore, red and blotchy. It is also advised that you don't use scrubs or exfoliating brushes whilst you have inflamed acne, as they are likely to irritate the acne lesions and may lead to an increased risk of scarring.

General guidance on using scrubs and exfoliating brushes?

Whether using chemical exfoliation, mechanical exfoliation, or both, trial the treatment for at least twelve weeks, as it takes time for your skin to respond to the treatments and, in the case of chemical exfoliation, for the acids to be able to penetrate deeper into the skin. However, if your skin is reacting badly to the treatment, for example becoming very red or sore, then you should of course stop the treatment rather than continuing for 12 weeks.

Whilst your skin is prone to acne, you should continue to exfoliate even after your acne symptoms have improved. The skin sheds its top layer every twenty-eight days and acne problems may reoccur if the treatment has been stopped.

Over the counter and prescribed

Azelaic Acid

What is azelaic acid?

Azelaic acid is an acne treatment which is available over the counter, without having to see a doctor, as well as being available through a prescription from your healthcare provider.

Azelaic acid is a chemical exfoliator. Exfoliating is a way of removing acne blockages that have already formed within your hair follicles, such as whiteheads and blackheads. It is also a way of

removing trapped skin cells, oil, cosmetics and other follicle-blocking substances from your skin, reducing your risk of developing acne in the future.

It is common to find azelaic acid in 10% concentrations in over-the-counter products and 20% concentrations in prescribed products. It often comes as gels or creams.

How does azelaic acid work?

Azelaic acid works in a similar way to alpha-hydroxy acids, by penetrating the skin and breaking up acne-causing blockages. It is generally not as effective as the other chemical exfoliators but it is much gentler on the skin and is a last resort when other treatment options won't be tolerated.

Azelaic acid also kills the bacteria known as P.acnes, which help to cause inflammation and pus formation in acne.

What are some of the side effects of using azelaic acid?

Side effects of azelaic acid include burning, redness and general skin irritation. To help reduce the risk of side effects, apply azelaic acid a few days a week to begin with and then gradually build up to daily use. Please see your product's details for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using azelaic acid

It is important to remember that most acne treatments take time to work. If you are trying azelaic acid it is advised that you continue the treatment for at least twelve weeks before deciding whether or not it has worked for you. It is also advised that you continue to exfoliate even after your acne symptoms have improved. The skin sheds its top layer every twenty-eight days and acne problems may reoccur if the treatment has been stopped.

Benzoyl Peroxide

What is benzoyl peroxide?

Benzoyl peroxide is an acne treatment available over the counter, without having to see a doctor or nurse, as well as being available through a prescription from a healthcare professional.

Benzoyl peroxide can be found in products in 2.5% to 10% concentrations and is often available as washes, creams and gels. However, there is little evidence to suggest that 10% benzoyl peroxide is significantly more effective than 2.5%. When using 10% concentrations there is an increased risk of skin irritation.

If you are not able to find benzoyl peroxide in an over the counter product at your local pharmacy then it may also be available on prescription from your healthcare provider.

How does benzoyl peroxide work?

Benzoyl peroxide works by counteracting the inflammation triggers that are released into the skin by bacteria. It also kills a certain type of bacteria called P. acnes, which is the main bacteria that is associated with acne. In addition, benzoyl peroxide also helps to reduce acne-causing oil production by the sebaceous glands in your skin.

What are some of the side effects of benzoyl peroxide work?

Side effects of benzoyl peroxide include redness, itching and skin peeling. Benzoyl peroxide can also bleach your hair and clothes. Please see your product details for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using benzoyl peroxide

As with most acne treatments, benzoyl peroxide takes time to work so allow for 12 weeks of use before determining whether or not the product has worked for you.

Prescribed treatments

Antibiotics

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are a form of medicine that kill bacteria. They can be used to help treat acne and are available through a prescription from your doctor or healthcare provider.

How do antibiotics work?

Antibiotics work in the treatment of acne by killing the bacteria known as *P. acnes*, which is associated with inflammation and pus formation. Antibiotics also have anti-inflammatory properties and can help to reduce the swelling and redness that is often seen in acne.

You can be treated with antibiotics that come as oral tablets and capsules or as topical treatments, which are applied directly to the skin. Common oral antibiotics for acne include tetracycline, oxytetracycline, doxycycline and lymecycline. Common topical antibiotics for acne include clindamycin and erythromycin.

What are some of the side effects of using antibiotics?

Side effects of antibiotics include skin rashes, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and bloating. Please see your product details and speak to your doctor for full instructions and warnings.

General guidance on using antibiotics

In the treatment of acne, antibiotics often work best when combined with other treatment options, such as retinoids or benzoyl peroxide. You should discuss with your healthcare provider how long you should try antibiotics for before deciding whether or not they have worked for you. You should also complete any course of antibiotics that your healthcare provider has prescribed you, unless they instruct you to stop.

Prescribed acne treatments are likely to be more effective against severe acne. That is acne that consists of many lesions covering an area, with cysts and nodules being present, and is often scarring. If you have acne that has lasted for several weeks and is getting worse, is leaving scars or is affecting your mental health then you should arrange to visit your GP for treatment.

Retinoids

What are retinoids?

Retinoids are a class of acne treatments that are available only on prescription from your doctor. They are derived from vitamin A and work in the same way as retinols, although they are significantly stronger and tend to be more effective in the treatment of acne.

Retinoids come in the form of topical treatments, which are applied directly to the skin, and oral capsules. Well known retinoids include tretinoin, adapalene and isotretinoin, the oral form of isotretinoin often being known by the brand name of Roaccutane. Common prescriptions of retinoids come in concentrations of 0.1% to 1% in topical treatments and 0.5-1mg per kilogram of patient weight in oral treatments.

How do retinoids work?

Retinoids work by promoting the growth of new skin cells whilst breaking down dead skin cells and other debris that may be trapped in the hair follicle. They also work to regulate the amount of keratin being produced by your skin as well as the amount of oil being produced by your skin's oil glands. This reduction of keratin and oil prevents dead skin cells from sticking together and forming acne-causing blockages.

In addition, retinoids can regulate skin tone and reduce the red, purple and brown colouring that acne can leave on the skin. They also work as an anti-inflammatory and can reduce the swelling and redness associated with acne.

What are some of the side effects of retinoids?

Retinoids, in particularly oral retinoids, can have rare but serious side effects. There is a potential link between anxiety, depression, anger, mood changes and retinoid use. You should not use retinoids if you have any pre-existing mental health conditions and you should stop treatment and seek medical help immediately if you begin to experience any of the symptoms outlined above.

More common side effects of retinoids are dry, irritated and peeling skin, headaches, nosebleeds and general pains. Retinoids can also make you more sensitive to the sun and you should use a non-oily sunscreen daily whilst undergoing treatment. You must not take retinoids if you are pregnant. You must also inform your doctor if you are taking any other form of acne treatment before you can use retinoids. This list of side effects and warnings is not exhaustive, so be sure to speak to your doctor and see product details for the full risks and warnings.

General guidance on using retinoids

As with most acne treatments, retinoids take time to work. Many people who take retinoids find that their acne symptoms worsen in the first week or so before getting better. To reduce the risk of an outbreak occurring it is advisable to begin an exfoliation treatment prior to starting retinoid treatment.

Retinoids often work better when combined with other forms of acne treatment, such as benzoyl peroxide. You must speak to your doctor before you start any combined treatment approaches.

After commencing retinoid treatment you should allow for 12 weeks of use before determining with your doctor whether or not retinoid treatment has worked for you. Once your acne has healed, you should discuss with your doctor or healthcare provider if you should keep using topical retinoid

treatments after your acne has healed and, if so, how long for. Oral retinoid treatments are not commonly used as a preventative measure for acne.

Hormone Therapy

What is hormone therapy?

Hormone therapy can be used as a form of acne treatment that is available for women and teenage girls, who have started menstruation, through a prescription from your healthcare provider.

One of the most well-known hormone therapies that is used for the treatment of acne is the contraceptive pill.

How does hormone therapy work?

As you may have seen on our 'Causes' page, hormones (especially testosterone and DHT) can play a significant role in the development of acne by encouraging your skin to produce more acne-causing oil. Hormone therapy works by reducing the amount of testosterone and DHT floating around freely in your blood.

Some hormone therapies, such as certain contraceptive pills, also introduce increased levels of the hormone oestrogen into the body. Oestrogen has the opposite effect of testosterone and DHT on the skin's oil glands and encourages them to produce less acne-causing oil.

What are some of the side effects of hormone therapy?

Side effects of hormone therapy include swelling, tenderness, mood changes, reduced libido and nausea. More serious side effects of certain hormone therapies can include organ damage. Please see your product and speak with your doctor for full instructions and warnings. Hormone therapy can only be used by adult women and teenage girls who have started menstruation. It cannot be used if you are pregnant.

General guidance on using hormone therapy

As with most acne treatments, hormone therapy takes time to work. You should allow for three months of continuous hormone treatment before deciding with your doctor or nurse whether or not hormone therapy has worked for you. It is not common to continue to use hormone therapy after your acne symptoms have improved, unless the therapy is being used for another purpose, such as a contraceptive or to treat Polycystic Ovary Syndrome.

Procedural

Steroid Injections

What are steroid injections?

Steroid injections are a form of acne treatment that are available in private clinics. Steroids, from a group known as corticosteroids, can be injected directly into an inflamed acne lesion to quickly reduce its size.

How do steroid injections work?

Steroid injections work by rapidly fighting inflammation within an acne lesion. In doing so, they reduce the number of chemical messengers within a lesion that are sending signals to white blood cells to rush in and fight the bacteria that are present. As a result, fewer white blood cells enter the lesion and less, if any, pus forms.

What are some of the side effects of steroid injections?

Possible side effects of steroid injections for acne include skin discolouration, infection and the thinning of skin tissue (atrophy). The risk of side effects increases significantly if steroid injections are used to treat smaller acne lesions. Steroid injections for acne must be carried out by a Consultant Dermatologist.

General guidance on steroid injections

Steroid injections for the treatment of acne are fast acting and often significantly reduce the size of large acne lesions, such as cysts and nodules, within 24-72 hours.

Please note that steroid injections are not an appropriate long-term treatment for an ongoing acne problem and do nothing to treat the cause of acne itself.

Chemical Peels

What is a chemical peel?

Chemical peels are a form of acne treatment that are available in private clinics. They use high concentrations of acid, often glycolic or salicylic, to break down the outer layers of skin.

Chemical peels are often carried out as a course of peels repeated every 4 to 6 weeks, depending on how deep into the skin the peel penetrates. Common concentrations of acid in chemical peels start at 15%.

How do chemical peels work?

Through the use of cosmetic acids, chemical peels shed the outer layers of skin to reveal a new layer of skin beneath, which is less affected and marked by acne.

The chemicals in chemical peels also work to break down acne-causing blockages of dead skin cells, oil and debris that have become trapped inside hair follicles.

What are some of the side effects of chemical peels?

Side effects of chemical peels include skin irritation, burns, scarring and changes to skin colour (pigmentation). Chemical peels for acne should only be conducted by a trusted professional who has had specific, recognised training in this treatment. You can find out more about this training at www.cosmeticstandards.org.uk.

General guidance on chemical peels

Chemical peels can be fast acting and improvements in mild to moderate acne are often seen within the first few days following treatment. However, it may take time for chemical peels to provide the maximum benefit that they can offer and you may wish to complete a full course of peels (as determined by your healthcare provider) before deciding if the treatment has worked for you.

Please note that chemical peels are unlikely to be effective against severe acne. That is acne that consists of many lesions covering an area, with cysts and nodules being present, and is often scarring. If you have acne that has lasted for several weeks and is getting worse, is leaving scars or is affecting your mental health then you should arrange to visit your GP.

Light and Laser

What are light and laser therapies?

Light and laser therapies are forms of acne treatment that are available in private clinics.

Currently, there is insufficient high-quality evidence to prove that light and laser therapies are effective as acne treatments. However, there is observational evidence (meaning that it has been noted but not confirmed by rigorous studies or clinical trials) that they may benefit people who are affected by mild acne. They are also an alternative treatment for people who cannot tolerate other forms of acne treatment (for example, due to unwanted side effects). More research is needed before we can gain a full understanding of how effective light and laser therapies are in the treatment of acne.

How do light and laser therapies work?

Light and laser therapies work by killing the type of bacteria, known as *P. acnes*, which helps to cause inflammation and pus formation in acne. There is also some evidence that light and laser therapies work to reduce the amount of keratin on your skin and therefore they reduce the likelihood of dead skin cells sticking together and forming a blockage in your hair follicle.

What are some of the side effects of light and laser therapies?

Side effects of light and laser therapies include burns, blistering, redness, peeling, changes in skin pigmentation (colour) and scarring. Light and laser therapies for acne should only be conducted by a trusted professional who has had specific, recognised training in using these devices. You can find out more about this training at www.cosmeticstandards.org.uk

General guidance on light and laser therapies?

As with most acne treatments, light and laser therapies take time to work. Your healthcare provider will be able to discuss with you how many sessions of therapy will be appropriate for your individual needs.

Please note that light and laser therapies are unlikely to be effective against moderate and severe acne. That is acne that consists of many lesions covering an area (with cysts and nodules being present in severe acne) and is often scarring. If you have acne that has lasted for several weeks and is getting worse, is leaving scars or is affecting your mental health then you should arrange to visit your GP.

Comedone Extraction

What is a comedone extraction?

Comedone extraction is a type of acne treatment that is available in private clinics. It is a form of mechanical exfoliation, meaning that it physically removes acne blockages from the skin, through use of force.

How does comedone extraction work?

As you may have seen on our 'Causes' page, most forms of acne start with tiny blockages in hair follicles known as comedones. Comedone extraction works by using a special tool known as a comedone extractor to physically remove the blockages from the follicles. This type of acne treatment can only be used on acne that has not become inflamed, such as whiteheads and blackheads.

What are some of the side effects of comedone extraction?

Possible side effects of comedone removal include pain or discomfort, scarring and infection. Comedone extraction should only be conducted by a trusted professional. If comedone extraction is not done correctly there is a risk of pushing blockages deeper into the skin as well as a risk of skin damage and scarring.

General guidance on comedone extraction

As comedone extraction refers to the physical removal of blockages from the hair follicle the improvement to acne affected skin is instant. However, the procedure can be quite uncomfortable to undergo and would need to be repeated once a month to remove new blockages as they form.

Please note that comedone extraction is not a suitable treatment for inflamed acne. If you have acne that has lasted for several weeks and is getting worse, is leaving scars or is affecting your mental health then you should arrange to visit your GP.