

Dermatology - Skin Conditions & Patient Information

Skin Conditions

Some of the common conditions we treat are listed below. The [British Association of Dermatologists](#) is a useful resource for information about specific skin conditions.

Skin Cancer

The skin cancers such as melanoma, squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma (rodent ulcers) often require Dermatology Surgery. It is thought that the sun is important in the production of many skin cancers, so moderation and avoiding burning is sensible. Some small skin cancers can be treated with freezing with liquid nitrogen, anti-cancer creams or with a new treatment called Photodynamic Therapy.

Eczema

Eczema and dermatitis are two words for the same problem. Often a number of different causes can act together to cause skin disease. Common causes include inherited eczema (associated with asthma and hay fever), eczema due to scratching or stress, or contact with something causing allergy, or contact with something that chemically irritates the skin. Other causes are lack of oil in the skin, varicose veins, standing or sitting for long periods, sensitivity to yeast, bacteria or viruses on the skin.



The term eczema is broadly applied to a range of persistent skin conditions. These include dryness and recurring skin rashes which are characterized by one or more of these symptoms: redness, skin oedema (swelling), itching and dryness, crusting, flaking, blistering, cracking, oozing, or bleeding.

Children with eczema come to the paediatric dermatology clinic. The doctors and nurses show how to soothe the problem with creams and bandage treatments. Some people require allergy patch testing to find a cause especially if it is mainly on one area of the body. More severe eczema may be treated with ultraviolet phototherapy, or with tablets.

Acne

Acne can be devastating for teenagers and for adults. It should never be dismissed as just a few spots if someone seeks help. There is usually a solution and most people find an answer. The risks and benefits of treatments need to be carefully weighed up.



Acne can affect up to 90% of teenagers and can also affect adults.

Food makes little difference to acne but it is advisable you stick to non-comedogenic make up and moisturisers.

There are four common treatments for acne. From weak to strong:

- Creams and lotions
- Antibiotics
- Hormonal treatments
- Isotretinoin (roaccutane)

We have a special nurse led monitoring clinic to review patients who are taking isotretinoin acne treatment.

Creams and Lotions

There are treatments for acne available at the chemist. Most acne responds well to Benzyl Peroxide (e.g. Brevoxyl Cream). This simple and safe treatment needs to be used correctly or it can irritate. The aim is to use it over the whole face so that it produces very mild pinkness that only you can detect. For some people this is once every two days, for others it is twice a day. It needs to be used regularly to prevent acne.

Antibiotics

Tetracycline antibiotics have been used for 30 or 40 years now for acne so have a good safety record. Occasionally, people get thrush infections and some people find antibiotics cause headaches, a sick feeling or sensitivity to the sun. Antibiotics take about six weeks to start working and then the effect can gradually improve throughout a six month course.

Hormonal Treatment

The Dianette pill is used for acne in women. This is a strong version of the contraceptive pill. It has the same type of side effects as the contraceptive pill but the risk of getting these is possibly higher -although recent research is not definite about this. The most worrying risk is thrombosis. This can produce a swollen calf in its mildest form but the much rarer severe form can produce a blood clot in the lung which can be fatal. Recent research indicates that women on Dianette may be between 2 and 7 times more likely to get thrombosis than those who are not taking any contraceptive pill at all. Thrombosis is commoner in people who have relatives with thrombosis, those who smoke and overweight people.

Isotretinoin (Roaccutane)

This treatment is taken as a 4-6 month course and clears 90% of people. 80% stay clear. Many people who have it think it is wonderful and has changed their lives - BUT everyone gets some side-effects which is why we use the other treatments first.

Everyone gets dry lips and dry skin, as the treatment works by reducing grease production by the skin. Dry eyes and nose can be a problem for some. Most people get some aches and pains.

Other side effects are rarer. Depression and Suicide is very uncommon but is listed as a risk. The research evidence for this gives varying answers. It is usually best not to start the table just before important exams just in case it does affect the mood.

The medicine is governed by a European directive - because women who get pregnant when taking it, or having recently taken it, can have abnormal babies. Those on treatment must be using an effective form of contraception during treatment and for at least four weeks after treatment has stopped.

Pregnancy tests are carried out every four weeks throughout treatment and we cannot give out a prescription until this has been done. Pharmacies aren't allowed to dispense prescriptions for this medication for more than four weeks for women.

Other side effects are also rare. Blood tests are carried out to check the liver and fat levels before and during treatment.

Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a chronic, non-contagious autoimmune disease which affects the skin and joints. It commonly causes red scaly patches to appear on the skin. The scaly patches caused by psoriasis, called psoriatic plaques, are areas of inflammation and excessive skin production. Skin rapidly accumulates at these sites and takes on a silvery-white appearance. Plaques frequently occur on the skin of the elbows and knees, but can affect any area including the scalp and genitals.

The cause of psoriasis is not known, but it is believed to have a genetic component. Factors that may aggravate psoriasis include stress, excessive alcohol consumption and smoking.

One in fifty people have psoriasis. Sometimes creams will clear the problem but others need courses of treatment with ultraviolet phototherapy. A few people need tablet or injection treatments.

Skin Infections

There are many skin infections; bacteria can cause septic areas, viruses cause warts and other growths and blisters, fungi can cause ringworm. The scabies mite is a common cause of itching. All these problems can be treated although some viral infections can be difficult to clear completely.

Allergies

Allergy causing localised contact eczema / contact dermatitis may need investigation in the patch test clinic.

Skin Colour Problems

Increases in pigmentation on the face can be as distressing as pigment loss. These conditions can usually be easily recognised and there are some treatments that may help.

Hair Problems

Hair loss due to skin conditions is common and can be very distressing. We have treatments for many of the common causes of hair loss.

Rarer Skin Disorders

There are over 2000 rarer skin disorders which our doctors and nurses will recognise and can often treat. These include inherited problems, excessive sweating, problems due to illness elsewhere in the body, reactions to medicines, and nail problems.

Further Information

For access to over 75 information leaflets and 50 patient support groups click on the link to the [British Association of Dermatologists](#) website.