

what you

# NEED TO KNOW about...

## Isotretinoin (Accutane®)

Isotretinoin is used to treat severe acne, when other treatments are not working.

### How does isotretinoin work?

Isotretinoin:

- Is a derivative of Vitamin A
- Reduces the amount of oil released by oil glands in the skin
- Reduces the inflammation associated with acne
- Helps your skin to renew itself more quickly
- Changes the course of acne

### How long before my skin starts to improve?

Most people notice that their skin gets better slowly over 5-6 months. You may start seeing improvement as early as 1-2 months after starting isotretinoin. Sometimes, acne gets worse (during the first few months) before it gets better, so be patient. Your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic to prevent bad flare ups. Call your doctor if you have a severe flare up.



### How do I take isotretinoin?

Take isotretinoin with food.

### Are there any risks to taking isotretinoin?

There are some risks linked to isotretinoin. Isotretinoin can cause:

1. Birth defects in a fetus (unborn baby) if taken during pregnancy. Even one dose of isotretinoin during pregnancy can cause defects to the unborn baby's:
  - Ears
  - Eyes
  - Face
  - Skull
  - Heart
  - Brain

We will check for pregnancy before any teen girl starts isotretinoin.

2. Severe headaches with nausea or visual changes. Stop isotretinoin and call your doctor right away if you notice these symptoms as isotretinoin could increase pressure in the skull (intra-cranial pressure).
3. Anxiety, depression or other mental health problems. Stop isotretinoin and call your doctor right away if you notice these.
4. Chest pain or heart palpitations. Stop isotretinoin and call your doctor right away if you notice this.
5. Hearing loss or ringing in the ears. Stop isotretinoin and call your doctor right away if you notice this.
6. Joint or muscle pain.
7. Changes in liver blood tests. Your doctor will take routine bloodwork to monitor your liver.
8. Decreased night vision.
9. Drug interactions: Do not take Vitamin A supplements or antibiotics like Tetracycline, Minocycline or Doxycycline. Vitamin A in food is not a problem.
10. Isotretinoin may also be associated with ulcerative colitis.

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## Possible side effects

Isotretinoin can sometimes cause minor side effects that are easy to treat.

- **Dry skin:** apply a moisturizer like glaxal base, schering base, cliniderm or Vaseline® cream. Use an oil free moisturizer for your face.
- **Dry lips:** use petroleum jelly or lip balm.
- **Dry nose:** use nasal gel or petroleum jelly.
- **Dry eyes:** use artificial tear drops or other eye lubricants (for example, Lacrilube®).
- **Mild aching of the back or joints:** Take acetaminophen (Tylenol®). If the pain is severe, call your doctor.
- **Photosensitivity (skin can sun burn more easily):** Wear sunscreen (non comedogenic, with SPF of 30 or more), avoid tanning beds and stay out of the sun during peak hours

## Preventing problems

- **Avoid alcohol and high fat foods.** Isotretinoin can increase blood cholesterol and triglycerides (fats in the blood). Switch to skim or 1% milk. We will do blood tests every month to check for this.
- **Check your night vision before driving at night.** Because isotretinoin can sometimes decrease your night vision, make sure you can see well at night before driving. Call your doctor if you have problems with night vision.
- **Do not take Vitamin A supplements, or antibiotics like Tetracycline, Minocycline or Doxycycline.** Vitamin A in food is not a problem.
- **Do not donate blood.** While you are on isotretinoin, and for 30 days after finishing it, do not donate blood.
- Do not have skin surgery or procedures for 6 months after stopping isotretinoin without speaking with your dermatologist first.
- **Keep clinic appointments.** We'll follow up with you in the clinic about every 4 weeks, so we can see how you're doing on isotretinoin. You must come in person to get your prescriptions, we will not call them in to a pharmacy for you.

## Preventing birth defects



There are things you can do to prevent pregnancy and the possibility of birth defects.

1. **Don't have sex.** It's an option to abstain from sex while you're taking isotretinoin and for 4 weeks after you finish the medication.
2. **If you do have sex, use 2 birth control methods.** Even the most effective birth control isn't perfect. When you're taking isotretinoin you **must have** a back up method. For example, this means:
  - Using birth control pills and condoms (condoms will give you good protection from sexually transmitted infections too)
  - Using effective birth control at least 1 month before starting isotretinoin, while taking isotretinoin and for at least 1 month after you stop taking isotretinoin

We will check for pregnancy before any teen girl starts isotretinoin. Two negative pregnancy tests are needed before starting Isotretinoin. If you will be sexually active, you need to start birth control at least 1 month before starting isotretinoin.

## Stop isotretinoin and call your doctor if you:

- Become pregnant or think you might be pregnant
- Have severe headaches (that may or may not happen along with nausea or changes in your vision)
- Feel depressed, irritable or anxious
- Notice chest pain or heart palpitations
- Develop hearing loss or ringing in the ears
- Have vomiting, diarrhea or abdominal pain



## Questions?

Dermatology Clinic Nurse: 613-737-7600 extension 3347

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