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General Management Tips for Acne

There is no single best treatment for acne, and combinations of treatments are often recommended. Since acne lesions take at least eight weeks to mature, you should use a treatment for a minimum of two to three months before deciding if the treatment is effective. General tips on managing your acne are below, but your individual plan may vary and this information should be used to compliment the regimen you discussed with your doctor.

1. Wash your face no more than twice daily using a gentle non-soap facial skin cleanser (eg, Cetaphil, Oil of Olay bar or foaming face wash, or Dove bar) and warm (not hot) water. Use your hands to wash your face as vigorous washing or scrubbing with washcloths can worsen acne and damage the skin's surface.
2. Do not pick or squeeze pimples because this may worsen acne and cause skin swelling and scarring. It can also cause lesions to become infected.
3. Use of a moisturizer minimizes dryness and skin peeling, which are common side effects of some acne treatments. Moisturizers that are labeled as "noncomedogenic" are less likely to block skin pores.
4. Women often benefit from hormonal treatment with a birth control pill.
5. If you have mild acne, you can try to treat yourself with nonprescription products initially. Nonprescription acne treatments may include salicylic acid, benzoyl peroxide, sulfur, alpha hydroxy acids, adapalene, or tea tree oil, all of which are available in nonprescription strengths.
6. A combination of medications, usually benzoyl peroxide with another topical agent is more effective than treatment with one agent alone.
7. Benzoyl peroxide is usually applied twice per day. It may be combined with other treatments in which case the benzoyl peroxide is applied in the morning and the other at night. Benzoyl peroxide can irritate the skin, sometimes causing redness and skin flaking, and it can bleach clothing, towels, bedding, and hair.
8. Some acne treatments increase the skin's sensitivity to sunlight. To minimize skin damage from the sun, avoid excessive sun exposure and use a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher that is broad spectrum (blocks UVA and UVB light).

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Sample Starting Regimen

1. Wash your face twice a day using a non-soap cleanser (see #1 above), removing any make-up as soon as you're back home
2. After washing, use an over-the-counter acne treatment as below:
 - If your acne is mild and you need more prevention to stop future break-outs (as opposed to spot treatment for current trouble areas), use a salicylic acid containing product like Neutrogena Oil-Free Acne Wash; this can be used twice a day. There are also salicylic acid containing body washes for those with acne in places other than the face
 - If you have more moderate acne, choose a benzoyl peroxide containing over-the-counter product, usually starting with a concentration of 2.5%. These can also be used twice a day unless you experience excessive dryness, which means you should cut back to once a day, usually in the evening. You may also want to start just at night if it's your first time using benzoyl peroxide and then adding a morning treatment after a few weeks. Products include both washes and spot-treatment creams or pads are available.
 - If you choose to use both salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide containing regimens, you should use salicylic acid in a wash in the morning and a benzoyl containing spot treatment cream or pad in the evening to avoid excessive skin irritation.
3. After washing and using a medicated product, allow the medication to dry, then apply a moisturizer, preferable with SPF 30 or greater protection
4. Don't pick at your pimples!
5. You should try this type of regimen for 2 months before considering it a failure.
If it doesn't give you adequate control, we may consider:
 - Adding a topical antibiotic
 - Adding a topical retinoid
 - Adding birth control pills (for females)
 - Adding oral antibiotics
 - Adding an oral retinoid