

Acne Primary Care Prescribing Guidelines

**Comedonal acne:** defined as non-inflamed acne with open comedones (blackheads) with few papules/pustules

**Adapalene cream or gel 0.1% 45g (£13.69)** topical retinoid; applied once daily thinly over whole area in the evening; explain to patient that it will dry the skin; if the patient experiences significant dryness or redness it can be started 2-3 nights a week and then increase frequency up to once a day; can be used with a non-oil based moisturiser.



**Mild to moderate papulopustular acne:** defined as inflamed acne with closed comedones (pustules)

**1st line: Epiduo - Adapalene 0.1% with benzoyl peroxide 2.5% Gel 45g (£17.91):** topical retinoid with BPO; to be applied in the evening thinly over whole area

or

**2<sup>nd</sup> line: Duac Gel – benzoyl peroxide 5%, clindamycin 1% in an aqueous base 25g (£9.95)** in the morning with Adapalene cream or gel 0.1% 45g (£13.69) in the evening



**Moderate /Severe papulopustular or moderate nodular acne:** superficial inflammatory lesions with few deep seated pustules (20-50) and some minor scarring only

**Small area:** either **Epiduo** or 2<sup>nd</sup> line Duac gel with adapalene (as above)

**Widespread:** if acne is more widespread covering trunk (back, shoulders and/or chest) consider oral therapy.

**lymecycline 408mg od (£6.22/28days) or**

**doxycycline 100mg od (£3.88/28days)** – caution with photosensitivity and must be taken with a large glass of water while sitting or standing

Ideally combine oral antibiotics with topical benzoyl peroxide (Brevoxyl cream 4% £3.30/40g) or retinoid/benzoyl peroxide (Epiduo) combination as this reduces antibiotic resistance and helps tackle the comedones which are the underlying problem. Refer to Dermatologist if not clear after 6 months of optimal oral antibiotics combined with topical treatment.



**Severe:** large number of papules, pustules, nodules and cysts with significant scarring or big psychological impact

**Refer to Dermatology Department** severe acne or acne unresponsive to oral antibiotics after 6 months. Prior to referral check LFTs and fasting lipids (and send them with the referral) in case oral isotretinoin is prescribed and all women of child bearing age should be on established contraception prior to referral for isotretinoin. If there has been complete resolution of symptoms at 6 months, therapy can be stopped or reduced, but some patients will continue to need maintenance therapy with topical adapalene for months or even years.

## General Management advice

- Debunk myths about acne – diet, washing, sunbeds unlikely to make much difference to the clinical course
- Explain the realistic timescale for improvement – weeks rather than days. Review topical therapy at 2-3 months and if no improvement at all, then change to second line, but if improving advise that full improvement may take up to 6 months
- Offer a good information leaflet, such as this <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/acne>
- Don't forget to assess the psychological impact of the acne. You can use a standardised questionnaire for this if you wish <http://www.dermatology.org.uk/quality/dlqi/quality-dlqi-questionnaire.html>
- Topical treatments for acne need to be applied to all skin ever affected by spots, not just on individual spots. The main mechanism of action is preventing the formation of new spots.
- Patients should be advised that benzoyl peroxide products can bleach fabrics
- In women who also wish to receive oral contraception co-cyprindiol may be considered. Co-cyprindiol (Dianette®) is licensed for severe acne, refractory to prolonged oral antibiotic therapy [[ABPI Medicines Compendium, 2012](#)]. The EMA found evidence from observational studies suggesting that co-cyprindiol has a 1.5–2 times statistically significant increase in venous thromboembolism risk compared with levonorgestrel-containing pills. It is thought that this risk is similar to that of contraceptives that contain desogestrel, gestodene, or drospirenone.
- Community pharmacists can recommend 'over the counter' initial treatments and advice for very mild acne. Benzoyl peroxide is a useful topical drug available over the counter; lower strengths cause less irritation.

See <http://www.pcds.org.uk/clinical-guidance/acne-vulgaris> for pictures of the different stages

### References:

<http://www.euroderm.org/images/stories/guidelines/Guideline-on-the-Treatment-of-Acne.pdf>

<http://cks.nice.org.uk/acne-vulgaris>

Pharmaceutical Press (September 2013) British National Formulary 66

Department of Health (October 2013) Drug Tariff

MHRA (2013) Cyproterone acetate with ethinylestradiol (co-cyprindiol): balance of benefits and risks remains positive—updated prescribing advice provided. *Drug Safety Update* 6(11), A3