

Let's Talk About...

Isotretinoin for Acne

Isotretinoin [ahy-soh-tri-TIN-oin] is a prescription medication that is taken by mouth to treat a severe type of acne called **nodular** [NOJ-uh-lur] **acne**. Typically, it is used when other acne treatments have not worked, such as antibiotic medications.



How does it work?

Isotretinoin works by reducing the amount of oil produced by your skin. It also helps your skin renew and repair itself more quickly.

How long will I be on the medication?

Isotretinoin is usually taken for 4 to 6 months but the length of treatment can vary from person to person.

While most patients have acne that improves and may even clear with this medication, acne can return in about 2 out of every 10 patients that take it. This could require extra acne treatment or even a second round of isotretinoin.

What do I need to do while taking isotretinoin?

- **You will get a 30-day supply of the medication at a time.** It can't be automatically refilled. When you pick up your prescription, make sure that you receive enough medication to last 30 days as pharmacies are unable to refill the prescription or make changes to it within a month.
- **Watch for side effects** (see [page 2](#)).
- **You must follow all instructions in the iPLEDGE program packet (ipledgeprogram.com)** that was provided (see also [page 3](#)).
- **You must return to your dermatologist (skin doctor) each month to check for serious side effects and get a new prescription.** For female patients, this visit will always include a monthly pregnancy test. Other tests for liver function, and cholesterol and triglyceride [try-GLIS-uh-ryd] levels, must also be given before and during treatment.

What should I avoid when taking isotretinoin?

- **Do not get pregnant 1 month before, during, or 1 month after taking any isotretinoin.**
- Do not donate blood while taking the medication or until 1 month after you stop taking it.
- Do not have cosmetic procedures to smooth your skin, including waxing, laser procedures, or dermabrasion, while taking this medication and for at least 6 months after you stop.
- Do not share your medication with anyone else. It can cause serious health problems and birth defects.
- Do not use any other acne medications during your treatment with isotretinoin unless directed to do so by your dermatologist. This includes medicated washes, cleansers, creams, or antibiotic pills.

How should I take isotretinoin each day?

The amount of medication prescribed to you is based upon your weight. Take it exactly as prescribed.

- If you miss a dose, skip that dose. **Do not take 2 doses at the same time.**
- Take with food to help with absorption (getting it into your system).

What are the possible side effects of isotretinoin? What should I do about them?

Most side effects of isotretinoin are mild and can be easily treated. Others can be more serious and concerning. Side effects may include:

- **Serious birth defects or miscarriage.** This can occur while taking the medication and for 1 month after taking the last dose. **You must not get pregnant while taking isotretinoin.** Once the medication is out of your system — in about 30 days — there is no effect on the baby.
- **Bleeding in the stomach or intestines.** Call your doctor **immediately** if you experience unusual abdominal (belly) pain or red or black, tarry stools (poop). You should also notify your doctor if you or a family member has a history of Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis.
- **Skin rash.** Call your doctor right away if you develop any skin rashes or blisters.
- **Increased pressure in the brain.** Call your doctor right away if you have a bad headache, dizziness, blurred vision, seizures, nausea, or vomiting.
- **Liver damage.** Call your doctor right away if you have severe stomach, chest, or bowel pain, painful swallowing, diarrhea, blood in your stool, dark urine (pee), or yellowing of your skin or eyes.
- **Changes in mood,** including depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts which may or may not be temporary. Notify your doctor if you or a family member have suffered from these conditions or if you have any concerns during treatment.
- **Worsening acne.** Mild worsening of acne can occur within the first few weeks of using isotretinoin. If your acne is getting significantly worse, call your doctor. This may require stopping the isotretinoin treatment temporarily and possibly adding other medications.
- **Bone, muscle, and tendon aches.** Call your doctor if you experience severe back or joint pain, or a broken bone. Additional stretching before and after physical activities may help relieve aches. If you are otherwise healthy, consider the use of ibuprofen [eye-byoo-PRO-fen] or naproxen [nuh-PROK-sen]. If you are unsure if you can use these pain medications, ask your doctor first.
- **Dry skin and eyes, chapped lips, and dry nose.**
 - **Dry skin.** Apply sensitive skin moisturizers to dry skin at least 2 times each day. You may need to apply sunscreen (SPF 30) in the morning and reapply it when outside.
 - **Dry eyes.** Use saline eye drops or artificial tears.
 - **Chapped lips.** Apply petroleum-based lip balms regularly. Call your dermatologist if you have tenderness, pain, cracks, or extra dryness.
 - **Dry nose or nosebleeds.** Use petroleum jelly and saline nasal spray in the nose, during the day and before going to bed. To stop nosebleeds, apply pressure to the sides of the nose. If this doesn't work, call your dermatologist.
- **Vision problems** that can affect your ability to see in the dark or drive at night.
- **Higher cholesterol and blood fat levels** (usually in patients with a personal or family history of cholesterol or triglyceride problems).

Initiating isotretinoin and the iPLEDGE Program

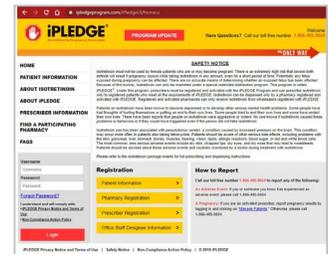
The iPLEDGE Program is a strict, government-required program to prevent females from becoming pregnant while on isotretinoin. All females and males must participate in the program. **Note:** Your healthcare provider must follow this program and cannot change any of the requirements.

- Before starting isotretinoin, your healthcare provider will talk to you about the safe use of this medication. You will also need to sign consent forms to receive treatment.
- If you do not go to your appointments, you will be unable to get your prescription filled.
- For females of childbearing age:
 - You must be on 2 specific forms of birth control before starting isotretinoin. Your healthcare provider must get 2 negative pregnancy tests, 30 days apart, before you can begin taking the medication. The second pregnancy test must be obtained within 5 days of your menstrual cycle. If you choose not to be sexually active during treatment, you still must have the 2 negative pregnancy tests.

- You must answer a series of questions either online or by phone every month.
- Monthly prescriptions must be filled within 7 days of your visit to the dermatologist. Notify your doctor well before the 7th day if there are any unforeseen delays, such as prior authorizations.

- For more information, visit: ipledgeprogram.com and click on **PATIENT INFORMATION**.

- For male patients and women of non-childbearing age:
 - There is no waiting period.
 - Once laboratory tests are done, treatment can start.



Questions for my doctor

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