

## Jay L. Cohen, M.D., P.C.

464 Hillside Avenue, Suite 303  
Needham, MA 02494  
Phone: (781) 449-3588  
Fax: (781) 449-5474

2000 Washington Street, Suite 404  
Newton, MA 02462  
Phone: (781) 449-3588  
Fax: (781) 449-5474

### Acne of the Face, Chest, and Back – Benzoyl Peroxide and Retinoid

You have been prescribed two topical medications for the treatment of acne on the face, chest, and back. This sheet will help you understand how to use these medications and the best practices to follow. Please review this information before starting your medications.

\_\_\_\_\_, which is a **benzoyl peroxide**. The benzoyl peroxide may bleach fabric; using it on the body during the day may result in bleaching of clothing. Using it on the face at night may result in bleaching of pillowcases.

\_\_\_\_\_, which is a **retinoid** (a chemical related to vitamin A. The original medication was known as Retin-A). The retinoid product may be inactivated by sunlight, so it is better to apply this to the face at night.

#### **How to use and apply the medications:**

- In the **morning** apply the benzoyl peroxide medication to your face and the retinoid medication to your chest and/or back after cleaning and drying your skin.
- At **night** apply the retinoid to your face and the benzoyl peroxide to your chest and/or back after cleaning and drying your skin.
- If your schedule makes it difficult to apply a cream/lotion in the morning, you can still apply the medications twice a day. The “morning” medication can be applied in the late afternoon or early evening. A few hours later you can wash off the “morning” medication and the “night” medication can be applied. Similarly, if you do not like to sleep with a cream on your skin, you may apply it a few hours before bedtime and then wash it off before you go to sleep. The key point is this: as long as each cream is on your skin for 1-2 hours, you will get the full benefit.
- During your first 7-10 days of treatment please use only the retinoid product. This will give your skin time to become accustomed to the effects of the retinoid. If after 7-10 days there is no significant irritation, you may begin applying the benzoyl peroxide in the morning. (If both medications are started at the same time and you develop a rash, it will be difficult to determine which medication is causing the problem).
- Before applying these medications to the face, wash with a mild soap, pat dry, and allow it to dry completely. For the benzoyl peroxide, put a ¼” strip of cream on your fingertip, dab it on your forehead, nose, cheeks and chin, then smooth it into a thin, even layer over your whole face (avoiding the eye area). You may apply the retinoid in the same manner; however try to use only one pea-sized amount of cream for the whole face. You may require a little more or less of each medication, so adjust the amount you apply to your particular need. The creams should disappear almost immediately as you massage them in.

- If it is helpful, you may add 1-2 pea-sized portions of moisturizer to the retinoid cream so that it will be easier to evenly cover the entire area needing treatment.
- Apply the medication to your chest and back by dabbing a small amount over the affected areas and massaging evenly into your skin. If you need to apply medication to your back and can't reach by hand, ask one of our staff about a medication wand for hard to reach places. We also suggest back brushes such as the Buff Puff back scrubber for use in the shower.

**When you are using these medications for the first time, there are a few important steps to follow, and helpful hints to keep in mind:**

- Never apply both the retinoid and the benzoyl peroxide medications at the same time because benzoyl peroxide will inactivate the retinoid. Always apply them at different times, at least a few hours apart.
- Do not use more than recommended or apply more frequently than instructed, because this may cause irritation, and will not provide faster or better results.
- Apply these medications anywhere you have acne or tend to get it, even if these areas have no acne at this time. These medications will do a reasonably good job of healing existing acne, but they do an even better job of preventing new acne.
- Your skin may be sensitive to these medications when you begin to use them. Side effects may include discomfort, peeling, and a slight redness of the skin. Redness or peeling usually subsides within two to four weeks. If necessary, the medication can be applied every other day until your skin can tolerate a daily application. Do not apply these medications to the corners of the nose, mouth, or eyes, or to any open sores.
- Please have patience. Your skin may get worse before it gets better. This is normal. Do not worry! When the medications are used properly, improvement is usually noted within four to six weeks, with considerable improvement noticeable in twelve to fourteen weeks.
- Do not stop using your medications once you begin to see an improvement. Continued use is needed to prevent recurrence of your acne. Once your acne is under control, you should continue to use your medications until Dr. Cohen instructs you to do otherwise.

## **Side Effects**

Initially you may have some peeling and redness of your skin, which is normal. If the peeling or redness is severe, please discontinue the medication and contact us at the phone number listed below.

Your skin may become more sensitive to the sun. Use a nongreasy (noncomedogenic) sunscreen, with a minimum of SPF 15, even when it is cloudy out. You should also avoid exposure to wind or excessive cold.

**\*\*It is recommended that you not use these medications if you may be pregnant or are planning to become pregnant. \*\***