



# Advice following isotretinoin treatment

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**This leaflet gives advice to people who have completed isotretinoin (brand name Roaccutane) treatment and answers several commonly asked questions.**

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## **How long before my skin's dryness, redness and sensitivity improves?**

These should start to improve as soon as you stop taking isotretinoin. Dryness and redness will gradually disappear over the next 1-2 weeks. For others it can be a little longer.

There is an increased risk of sunburn even after completing treatment so you must ensure extra care is taken with sun protection for 4-weeks.

The medication remains in your system for around 1-month, so you should see the most improvement in acne side effects after this time. You will see continued benefits in your skin from the isotretinoin treatment for up to 3-months.

## **Will my acne come back?**

For around 70% (7 out of 10) patients, acne does not return after isotretinoin is stopped.

If it does return, then it is unlikely to be as severe as it was previously. If it recurs, it will usually return a few months or years after completing treatment.

It is normal to experience the occasional spot after completing treatment! This can be managed easily with topical acne treatments and using non-comedogenic (non-pore blocking) products (that usually claim on the label 'not to cause blocked pores').

## **If my acne returns and is severe, can I have another course of isotretinoin?**

Antibiotic treatment that did not work previously may work more effectively following a course of isotretinoin. However, around 5-10% (1 or 2 out of every 20) patients will require a further course of isotretinoin (in rare circumstances more than 2 courses may be needed if the acne returns each time).

Your GP or dermatologist will need to assess your skin first and decide whether it is the most appropriate treatment option for you.

## **Are there any precautions I should take after stopping isotretinoin?**

Yes, there are some important points you need to be aware of after treatment with isotretinoin.

- **You must not:**
  - Give blood for 30 days.
  - Get pregnant for 1-month if you are female (you must continue taking regular contraception during this time).

- There is an increased risk of scarring due to increased skin fragility and sensitivity, so you should avoid the following at least 6-12 months:
  - Piercings
  - Tattoos
  - Laser hair removal
  - Microdermabrasion
  - Laser resurfacing
  - Waxing (1-month)

### **Should I use maintenance treatment after completing isotretinoin?**

Maintenance treatment is a good idea, as it is normal to get the occasional spot after completing treatment with isotretinoin.

Topical treatments such as Epiduo gel can be used twice weekly to areas prone to acne. This can be prescribed by your GP and is best started a few weeks after completing treatment with isotretinoin, when your skin will initially be dry and flaky.

### **Any recommendations for a skincare routine after completing isotretinoin?**

In the first few weeks after completing isotretinoin, your skin is still likely to be red, flaky and sensitive. Therefore, it is best to keep your routine simple. Stick to a gentle non-comedogenic cleanser, a gel/lotion based moisturiser and a daily sunscreen.

Following on from this, if you notice that your skin is becoming oily or if you are developing the occasional spot, you can introduce active ingredients back into your skin care routine, such as:

- A foaming non-comedogenic pH balanced cleanser. Inclusion of ingredients such as salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide are useful.
- A gel/lotion based moisturiser.
- A retinoid based treatment twice weekly to problematic areas. This can be prescribed by your GP.
- Sunscreen. Choose a broad spectrum sunscreen (UVA & UVB protection), minimum SPF 50. Look for formulas that are anti-shine, mattifying, oil free and non-comedogenic.

### **Will my acne scars fade?**

You may notice some improvement in acne scarring naturally with time. Isotretinoin itself does not treat acne scarring but can help prevent further scarring during treatment as it treats active acne.

Unfortunately, there are no specific treatments available on the NHS for acne scarring; however, there are options available in the private sector, which you can discuss with your GP e.g. laser and chemical peels. Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/acne/complications/> for more advice.

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