



Starting Accutane/ isotretinoin: What Patients and Families Should Know

Accutane/Isotretinoin is a highly effective medication for treating acne that has not improved with other treatments. Isotretinoin treats acne by shrinking the oil glands to prevent clogged pores and acne forming bacteria. It can also decrease inflammation of the skin. There are a lot of things to know before you can get started.

Accutane is a commitment. Can you commit to it?

- **It requires 5-6+ months of monthly blood tests and visits.**
- We do not draw blood at our office. The blood tests can be done at a lab of your choice (we recommend QUEST OR LABCORP), and ideally should be drawn a few days *before* each monthly visit. The monthly visits can sometimes be done via telehealth.
- Your provider cannot send in the medication to your pharmacy each month without first viewing your lab results.

What are the Side Effects?

Most common/ Expected:

Dryness of skin, lips, eyes, nose

More likely to get a sunburn

Somewhat common/ Tell your provider if you experience:

Joint Pain

Muscle Pain

Headaches

Rare side effects/ *Stop the Medication and call our office if you experience:*

Depression

Suicidal Thoughts

Change in Vision

Other rare side effects:

Hair loss

See Ipledgeprogram.com or the IPLEDGE REMS Fact Sheet for full side effect information.

Tell your provider if you have a history of depression or are currently being treated for depression.

While you are taking Accutane, **you should NOT:**

- Donate blood
- Get a tattoo, wax, or elective surgery during treatment due to risk of scarring
- Take additional Vitamin A in pill form. Check your multivitamin—often this has Vitamin A.
- Share the medication with anyone else
- Drink alcohol. If you choose to drink alcohol, you should not drink more than 1 per day.
- Drive if you experience vision changes

Before starting Accutane, **you should:**

-Discontinue all other acne medications (oral or topicals). You will not use any other acne medication besides Accutane during this time. It is NOT SAFE to take doxycycline or other tetracycline medications at the same time as Accutane.

-Purchase (to be used DAILY while on Accutane):

- non-comedogenic, broad spectrum sunscreen of SPF 30-50 daily. This medication makes your skin more sensitive to sunburn. We also recommend sunscreen lip balm.
- a thick emollient cream (Cetaphil, CeraVe or Eucerin brands) for body/ face and a thick ointment (Aquaphor or Vaseline) for lips. You will need to apply these frequently because the medication causes dryness. The dryness usually stops when you've finished taking the medication.
- gentle cleanser for skin to be used twice daily (Cetaphil or CeraVe are good brands)
- Recommended for dryness/nose bleeds: a cool mist humidifier for the bedroom..
- Recommended based on symptoms: For nosebleeds, saline mist/spray
- Recommended for dryness: Omega-3 supplements (1g/day)

Additional Information For patients who Can Become Pregnant:

This medication can cause birth defects. It is very important not to become pregnant while on this medication.

- You can choose abstinence as your contraceptive method *as long as you commit to this method for the entirety of your treatment and for 1 month after discontinuing treatment*. Abstinence means the person who can become pregnant commits to not having any sexual contact with a partner that could result in pregnancy, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for one month before, during and for one month after isotretinoin treatment.
- If you are sexually active with a partner that could result in a pregnancy, you must commit to using 2 forms of birth control. Do not switch these 2 forms of birth control while taking this medication because it may cause a delay in receiving your medication.
- The U.S. FDA requires that you comply with a program, IPLEDGE, in order to receive this medication. You will create an IPLEDGE account with a password.
- Each month, you must log into IPLEDGE and answer comprehension questions about Accutane and confirm you are either abstinent or your forms of birth control. You must answer these questions before you can pick up the medication each month.
- Before you can start Accutane, you must have two negative pregnancy tests 30 days apart.

When I get the medication, how should I take it?

Accutane/ isotretinoin is best absorbed when taken with food. The medication will work best if you take it with fatty foods. Examples include whole milk, cheese, avocado, eggs, and fatty fish. If you are taking two pills per day, ideally you should take one pill in the morning and one in the evening. However, if you can

only remember to take the medication once per day, that is fine. Take the medication at the same time every day to help you remember.

Can this medication make my acne worse?

Some people can experience a flare (worsening inflammation/ pain/ redness) of their acne when starting this medication. This flare usually lasts 1 week or less. If you experience this and cannot tolerate it, please call our office at 303-604-1444. Your provider may decide to prescribe a medication to combat this flare.

What are the next steps?

For Patients who cannot become pregnant:

- Go to a lab (LabCorp/ Quest Labs/ hospital lab) that is conveniently located for you. Bring the lab order we gave you today. **Do not eat 12 hours prior to having your labs drawn** (water is ok). Show the lab the “Standing Order” part of the lab order, so that they have this order on file for you every month (that way, you won’t need to bring in a paper copy of the lab order each month).
- Call our office if you do not hear back from us about your lab results 4 days after having your labs drawn
- The lab will send the results directly to us. We will call you about your results. As long as labs results are within safe limits, our staff will confirm you are registered in IPLEDGE and your provider will send in the prescription for Accutane to your preferred pharmacy
- Pick up the medication at your pharmacy

For Patients who CAN become pregnant:

- Urine pregnancy test in the office today- must be negative to proceed.
- **At least 30 days later (no sooner than 30 days),** Go to a lab (LabCorp/ Quest Labs/ hospital lab) that is conveniently located for you. Bring the lab order we gave you today. **Do not eat 12 hours prior to having your labs drawn** (water is ok). Show the lab the “Standing Order” part of the document, so that they have this order on file for you every month (that way, you won’t need to bring in a paper copy of the lab order each month).
- Call our office if you do not hear back from us about your lab results 4 days after having your labs drawn
- Return to the office in approximately one month
- The lab will send the results directly to us. We will call you about your results. As long as labs are within safe limits, our staff will confirm you are registered in IPLEDGE and your provider will send in the prescription for Accutane to your preferred pharmacy
- Log in to IPLEDGE at www.ipledgeprogram.com and answer some comprehension questions about this medication
- Pick up the medication at your pharmacy

~Please call our office 303-604-1444 if you have trouble obtaining your medication or if you have questions about this process. We are happy to help.~