



Treating Acne with Isotretinoin (Accutane)

Isotretinoin is a retinoid medication that is taken orally to treat severe acne. Typically, it is used once other acne treatments have not worked. Usually, isotretinoin is taken for 4 to 6 months, although the length of treatment can vary. While most patient's acne improves and may even clear for life with this medication, in up to 20% of patient's acne can come back. This could require additional acne treatment.

Starting treatment and the iPledge Portal:

- The iPledge Program is a strict, government-required program to prevent patients of childbearing potential from becoming pregnant while on isotretinoin. All patient must participate.
- Before starting isotretinoin, you will review with your doctor and sign iPledge paperwork.
- For patients of non-childbearing potential, there is no waiting period between enrollment in the iPledge portal and ability to receive medication. Once laboratory tests are done, treatment can start.
- For patients of child-bearing potential, you must specify two forms of birth control or pledge abstinence before starting isotretinoin. You must show us two negative pregnancy tests, 30 days apart, before you can receive with the medication.
 - After you are enrolled by us, you will receive an email from iPledge. This email will prompt you to create your iPledge portal account where you must take monthly quizzes before you can pick up your medication.

What to do before you can get your medication:

- **Discontinue all other acne medication:** Patient must stop tetracycline antibiotics 3-5 days before starting Accutane. They must discontinue all other oral and topical medications 1 day before starting treatment unless informed otherwise by their doctor.
- **Book monthly appointments:** Isotretinoin is only dispensed in a 30-day supply. You must have an appointment with us every month (these can be virtual), so we can monitor for side effects and send refills. We recommend booking 3-4 virtual appointment 28-30 days apart before starting treatment.
- **Blood work:** Isotretinoin can impact your liver function; therefore, before certain appointments, (usually before you start treatment and once you reach your goal dose 2 months into treatment) we will have you get labs done. This can be done any time before your next appointment. We always say the sooner the better because if we do not have your lab results before your next appointment we cannot dispense the next month's supply.
 - If you get your lab work done at a [Newton-Wellesley associated lab](#) or a lab on the Mass General Brigham system, the lab requisition form is sent virtually through Epic. If you are going to an outside lab, you will need a printed copy of the lab requisition form from our office and the results will need to be faxed to us.
- **Pregnancy test:** All patients of childbearing potential will need to take monthly pregnancy tests on the day of their appointment. The test can be shown to you doctor during your virtual appointment (if you have an in-person appointment we will do the test in the office). We recommend buying a 6-8 pack of [pregnancy tests on Amazon](#) before starting treatment. Isotretinoin can cause birth defects so we must verify patients are not pregnant each month before dispensing the medication.
- **Take your quiz:** All patients of childbearing potential must take an online quiz before they can pick up their medication. This quiz will become available on the iPledge portal after you have done your lab work (if necessary), taken your pregnancy test, and had your appointment. You MUST pick up the medication within 7 days of your appointment or you may become locked out of the system.

Potential Side Effects:

- ***Dryness:*** The most common side effect of Isotretinoin is dry skin, dry eyes, chapped lips and dry nose that may lead to nosebleeds. We recommend finding a skin moisturizer you like ([CeraVe](#) is a good brand) and using Aquaphor or [Dr. Dan's Cortibalm](#) for dry lips. A small amount of Aquaphor and Petrolatum jelly into the nose can help with nose bleeds. For dry eyes we recommend [Refresh Preservative Free](#) eye drops.
- ***Bone, muscle and tendon aches:*** To combat potential body aches, we recommend stretching before and after activities. If you are otherwise healthy, periodic use of ibuprofen is fine. Please call us if you experience severe back pain, joint pain, or a broken bone.
- ***Changes in mood:*** Isotretinoin in some patients can cause anxiety, depressive symptoms or even suicidal thoughts. If you have a history of anxiety or depression, please inform your dermatologist before starting treatment. If you see a mental health professional, please inform them of your plan to start Accutane. Notify your doctor if you or a family member have suffered from these conditions or if you have any concerns during treatment.
- ***Increased blood fats and cholesterol and liver damage:*** This side effect usually only impacts patients with a personal or family history of liver failure or cholesterol/triglyceride problems. We will monitor this with periodic lab work.
- ***Serious birth defects or miscarriage:*** Isotretinoin can cause this while on treatment and 1 month after taking your last dose of isotretinoin. This is why patients of childbearing potential must not get pregnant while on treatment. We will monitor this with monthly pregnancy tests and quizzes through the iPledge portal.
- ***Other side effects:*** While unlikely, isotretinoin can cause vision problems, increased pressure in the brain, skin rash, gastrointestinal bleeding and worsening acne (most common in the first few weeks of treatment).

Precautions when using this medication:

- You may get sunburned more easily and become more sensitive to UV exposure. Avoid sun and tanning beds. Use sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) and wear protective clothing.
- Do not become pregnant from 1 month prior to 1 month following taking any isotretinoin.
- Do not donate blood while taking isotretinoin or until 1 month after coming off the medication.
- Do not have cosmetic procedures to smooth your skin, including waxing, dermabrasion, or laser procedures, while taking this medication and for at least 6 months after you stop.
- Do not use any other acne medications, including medicated washes, cleansers, creams or antibiotic pills during your treatment with isotretinoin unless expressly directed by your doctor.

Please call us at 781-416-3500 or send a message through Patient Gateway if you have any questions