

# Accutane (isotretinoin) basics

**Treats severe acne.** Accutane (isotretinoin) works well against severe acne but has a lot of serious side effects. You will need to discuss the risks and benefits with your doctor.

## What to expect when starting

Here's when people typically experience benefits as well as some possible side effects. Your experience may be different.

	Hours	Days	Weeks	Months	Long term
<b>Accutane (isotretinoin)</b> Drug effectiveness		[Blue bar spanning Days, Weeks, and Months]			
<b>Possible side effects†</b>					
<b>Back pain</b>			[Red bar spanning Weeks, Months, and Long term]		
<b>Dry/chapped lips</b>		[Red bar spanning Days, Weeks, and Months]			
<b>Blurry vision</b>		[Red bar spanning Days, Weeks, and Months]			
<b>Irritability</b>			[Red bar spanning Weeks, Months, and Long term]		
<b>Joint pain</b>			[Red bar spanning Weeks, Months, and Long term]		
<b>Depression</b>			[Red bar spanning Weeks, Months, and Long term]		

† Data on frequency of side effects is not available.

## Tips from pharmacists

- You'll have to use birth control if you're sexually active and taking Accutane (isotretinoin) because it can cause birth defects. Talk to your doctor about appropriate birth control.
- You should not donate blood while on Accutane (isotretinoin) and for 1 month after stopping.
- You may need to get frequent blood work done while on Accutane (isotretinoin).
- Accutane (isotretinoin) could make your skin more sensitive to sunlight. Wear sunscreen and protective clothing when going out. Avoid prolonged sun exposure and tanning beds.
- Your skin may initially look worse before it gets better.
- Avoid harsh skin products and treatments (such as microdermabrasion, laser treatments, waxing), while on Accutane (isotretinoin). These can further irritate your skin and raise your risk of scarring.

## Risks and warnings

The FDA has identified these as possible serious or life-threatening risks with this medication. Contact your doctor if you experience any of these.

### Harm to fetus

Accutane (isotretinoin) can cause harmful effects on unborn babies. Due to this risk, Accutane (isotretinoin) is only available through a special program that you, your doctor and your pharmacy must sign up for. You can sign up for this program after discussing the risks and benefits with your doctor. Women of child-bearing age must use 2 reliable forms of contraception for 1 month before therapy, during therapy, and for 1 month after therapy. You'll also need to have regular pregnancy tests while taking Accutane (isotretinoin).

### Suicidal thoughts or behavior

Rarely, suicidal thoughts or behavior can occur while you're on Accutane (isotretinoin). Talk to your doctor right away if you notice any unusual changes in mood or behavior, especially during the first few months of treatment or when the dose changes.

### High cholesterol

Accutane (isotretinoin) can increase the amount of cholesterol in the blood. You may need to have bloodwork done regularly to check your lipids. This usually goes away once you stop the medicine.