

ISOTRETINOIN

What is it?

Isotretinoin is a vitamin-A derivative used to treat severe and stubborn acne. It is the closest treatment to a cure that we have, with a cure rate of about 70%. Patients not cured by isotretinoin may require topical medications for maintenance, oral antibiotics (less frequently), or another course of isotretinoin (rare). The duration of treatment is typically 5-6 months.

Blood Tests: We will give you a form to take to your nearest LabCorp location and have your monthly labs drawn. This should be done the week of your follow-up appointment. We are specifically noting your cholesterol and liver enzymes, so it is best to obtain labs about a 12-hour fast (water is okay). If you lose your lab sheet, just give the office a call.

iPledge: iPledge is a computer-based, FDA approved, risk management program designed to eliminate fetal exposure to isotretinoin. Females of childbearing potential must use two forms of contraception for one month before, during, and after isotretinoin therapy, accompanied by negative pregnancy test results. For young patients, abstinence is an exception. You cannot begin treatment with isotretinoin until you are registered with the iPledge system, and you must log onto your account each month before going to the pharmacy to pick up the medication.

Female patients: Females with childbearing potential must have a negative pregnancy test result one month prior to starting the medication, at the time the medication is started, each month while taking the medication, as well as one month after discontinuing the medication. These urine pregnancy tests are done in the office.

What do I need to know?

Make sure to take this medication with food, and do not take isotretinoin with doxycycline, minocycline, or tetracycline. Other antibiotics are safe. Acne flares are common during the first 1-2 months of treatment, so avoid picking at or scrubbing your face – it will get better!

Side Effects: Isotretinoin is very safe and it is a wonder drug for acne. However, if you do have problems, please call the office. Percentages below are from studies using high dose isotretinoin.

Birth Defects: There is absolutely no doubt that isotretinoin causes major birth deformations and defects, but it only has an effect on a currently growing fetus. One month after isotretinoin has been discontinued, it is out of the system and will have no effect whatsoever on pregnancy or fetal development.

Skin:

- Chapped lips (96%): Apply Vaseline or Aquaphor to damp lips throughout the day.
- Dry skin (67%): Try Vanicream Lite lotion for the face and a thicker moisturizing cream (in a jar, such as CeraVe cream) on the body. Always dampen skin first.
- Dry nose/nosebleeds (50%): Apply Aquaphor to the inside of the nose.
- Sun sensitivity (20%): Stay protected. Wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 50 at least) and a wide-brimmed hat.
- Dry eyelids (11%): Use Cellufresh eye drops or Lacrilube eye ointment.
- Skin infections (7%): Crusting around the mouth/lips is fairly common. If not allergic, you can use Neosporin. You may need oral antibiotics.
- Skin fragility (2%): Be careful when waxing to remove hair.
- Hair thinning (0.5%): Rare and completely reversible upon discontinuation of the medication.

General:

- Elevated cholesterol and triglycerides (50%): We are checking these levels every month when you have your labs done. Don't forget to fast before blood draws and refrain from alcohol 3 days beforehand.
- Muscle, bone, or joint pain (13%): If it is not tolerable, stop the medication for 3 days and then attempt to restart.
- Headache, visual disturbance, nausea, dizziness (5%).
- Depression/irritability (1%): Acne itself is associated with depressed mood in thousands of acne patients, and understandably so. There have been reports of worsening depression and even suicides in more rare cases of patients taking isotretinoin. However, it is important to know that there is less risk of depression and suicide in patients treated with isotretinoin compared to untreated patients that have severe acne. Numerous reports show improved mood on isotretinoin long before the acne improves. Nevertheless, please report any significant mood changes so that appropriate counseling or intervention can be arranged.
- Abdominal pain/diarrhea (unusual): A link between isotretinoin and inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis) has not been established.

Important points to remember:

- After is decided that you will begin a course of isotretinoin and the iPledge consent has been signed, you should receive an email from iPledge asking you to create a password for your account. If you do not receive this email within two business days after signing the consent, call iPledge at 1-800-495-0654. You can also call our office for assistance if needed.
- Once you receive your prescription from our office, you have 7 days to answer your iPledge questions and fill out the prescription before it expires.
- For females, there is a 30 day mandatory waiting period prior to starting isotretinoin during which you must use two forms of contraception and have two negative pregnancy tests (30 days apart) before you are able to start the medication. If you do not pick up the medication within your 7 day window, you will be "locked out" of iPledge for 12 days after which you must return to the office for another pregnancy test before being able to pick up your medication.
- Your appointments should be as close to 30 days apart as possible.

Please call the office at (865) 450-9361 if you have any questions or concerns.