



Instructions for Application of Topical Retinoids

Acne treatment often involves the use of topical retinoids. These medications are derivatives of vitamin A and are used in the prevention of acne. Examples of these medications include tretinoin (retin-A), adapalene (differin), and tazarotene(tazorac). These medications may be a component of several combination drugs to treat acne. When applying these medications there are several things to consider in order to minimize adverse effects and optimize effectiveness.

1. Do not use these medications if you are pregnant or breastfeeding
2. Retinoids prevent acne, thus treatment of the entire acne prone area is necessary (not just spot treatment).
3. Retinoids should be applied in the evening
4. If you wash your face in the evening, use a mild cleanser. Do not scrub.
5. Pat dry
6. Apply a small amount of a non-comedogenic moisturizer to the face then apply a small amount of the retinoid cream, gel or lotion to the entire face. Only a pea- sized amount is needed per facial application. Ensure that the entire area involved receives a thin film of the retinoid. Do not simply spot treat active lesions as these medications are meant to prevent acne and work best when applied to the entire area involved.
7. If your shoulders, chest or back are involved, you may use a small amount for these areas using the medication as above.
8. It is normal to develop redness, dryness and peeling during the first several weeks of using these medications. This will gradually improve with continued use of the medication and is to be expected. One can minimize this irritation by using a mild non-comedogenic moisturizer twice daily and by applying the medication every other night for the first 2-3 weeks.
9. All retinoids will cause some increased susceptibility to sun burns, thus one must ensure adequate sun protection. This can be achieved with a broad spectrum UVA/ UVB sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher to be applied 15 minutes prior to anticipated sun exposure. If prolonged sun exposure is anticipated frequent re-application is suggested.