

# Isotretinoin

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## What Is This Medication Used For

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**Related: Inflammatory Skin Conditions**

## Dosage and How to Use

Isotretinoin is available in the form of capsules. Take this medicine as directed by your doctor.

Take this medicine with meals as it is best absorbed with food.

### Missed a Dose

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose.

Do not double the next dose to make up for the missed dose.

**Related: Minocycline**

## Side Effects, Precautions, Contraindication

### What other effects may it cause?

A course of treatment with isotretinoin usually takes 4 to 8 months. Your doctor will prescribe the dose of isotretinoin based on your body weight, and aim for a certain target cumulative dose.

After 1 to 2 weeks, you will probably notice your skin getting less oily. After 3 to 4 weeks, your acne will show signs of clearing.

In some people, the acne may seem to get worse during the first few weeks. If it happens to you, do not be discouraged. If you continue taking this medicine, you will notice an improvement.

Certain side effects of this medicine are not unusual and may even disappear during treatment. If any of the following effects persist or are severe, consult your doctor.

- Red, cracked and sore lips. This can be relieved by applying petroleum jelly or a lip moisturiser.
- Irritated and dry eyes. If you wear contact lenses, use of eye drops or artificial tears should help prevent this.
- Dry skin, sometimes with peeling. Relieve by applying a moisturiser.
- Dry mouth and nose. In extreme cases, some nose bleeding may occur.

The following uncommon side effects may occasionally occur. Consult your doctor if any of them becomes a problem.

- Headaches
- Muscle and joint pain or stiffness - avoid strenuous exercise
- Temporary hair loss
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Sensitivity to sunlight which may result in a severe sunburn - avoid excessive exposure to the sun
- Blurred vision (rare)
- Mood changes including depression (rare)

Your doctor will also perform blood tests (cholesterol/triglycerides and liver function test) before you start the treatment and at least once during the course of treatment. This is to monitor for any abnormalities as isotretinoin can cause the level of cholesterol and triglycerides in your blood to increase and may occasionally cause raised liver enzymes.

**Related: Acne**

**What precautions should I take?**

- Isotretinoin has been reported to cause serious harm to unborn babies when taken during pregnancy. Women who are pregnant, who intend to become pregnant, or who are breastfeeding should tell their doctors before taking this medication.
- You must use strict birth control for at least 1 month before you start isotretinoin, for the whole time you are taking isotretinoin and for at least 1 month after discontinuing this drug.
- Before you start taking your course of isotretinoin, you should wait until the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day of your next menstrual period. If you suspect you are pregnant, do not start the isotretinoin at all.
- If you are already taking isotretinoin and discover that you have become pregnant, stop taking it immediately and tell your doctor.
- Isotretinoin may cause skin to become more fragile, increasing the risk of poor wound healing and scar formation. Avoid undergoing procedures which involve skin or hair removal, such as waxing, dermabrasions, facial peels, laser treatments during the isotretinoin course, and for at least 6 months after stopping. In addition, please inform your surgeon or dentist before you undergo any surgical or dental procedures.
- Inform your doctor you have diabetes, liver or kidney disease or high-fat levels in your blood.
- Do not donate blood while you take isotretinoin and at least one month after you stop taking it. This is to prevent the possibility of a pregnant patient receiving the blood.
- Limit your exposure to sunlight. Use a sunscreen product and wear protective clothing when you are exposed to direct sunlight.
- Do not take tetracyclines (tetracycline, doxycycline, minocycline) as these antibiotics increase the risk of high pressure in the head leading to headaches, nausea and vomiting.
- Do not take vitamin preparations containing high doses of vitamin A. Inform your doctor if you are taking over-the-counter medicines, including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products.
- Isotretinoin can increase the amount of triglycerides (fats) in your blood. Limit your intake of alcoholic drinks, as alcohol also increases triglycerides in your blood
- Do not allow anyone else to take this medication.

**Related: Skin Care Tips During Pregnancy and After Birth**

## Handling and Storage

- Keep this medicine away from heat and direct sunlight in a cool, dry place, out of reach of children.
- Do not keep this medicine with other medications in the same container. Keep each medicine separately in labelled containers.

*When in doubt, consult your doctor or pharmacist*

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