

## **ISOTRETINOIN THERAPY**

As we have already discussed, isotretinoin (Various brand names - Sotret, Claravis, Amnesteem, Absorica) is one of the most effective treatments for severe acne. All patients who take isotretinoin experience some minor, bothersome side effects. There are some simple things you can do to make these problems much easier to live with.

The major problem is dryness of the lips. Essentially this is a chapped lip problem. The treatment is using a lip therapy as many times a day as necessary. Some patients use the therapy three or four times whereas other patients find it necessary to use up to 20 times a day. My suggestion is to purchase three or four of the Vaseline Lip Therapies or Blistex-type products and to keep one with you at all times. If you happen to forget the medication for a day or two the lips can get so chapped as to crack and bleed. All of this is preventable if the medication is used regularly.

Another problem, which some patients develop, is dryness inside the nose. If a small scab develops and falls off there could be a minor nosebleed. This can be prevented very simply. Apply Vaseline or Aquaphor to the nose once or twice a day with your little finger or a Q-tip. These are over-the-counter ointments, which can be purchased in any drugstore.

Another side effect is dryness of the skin, which can develop anywhere but is common on the face and arms. By applying an over the-counter moisturizer to the areas once per day after a shower, this problem can be prevented.

Many patients taking isotretinoin develop minor aches and pains in the neck, back, or other areas. This is also a minor side effect, which in most cases goes away despite continuing the treatment. You should continue your normal activities. If the discomfort worsens, you may take aspirin or Advil. If this persists or you develop other side effects, you should call me on the telephone or point it out to me at your next visit

Recently there have been reports of skin fragility with isotretinoin. This developed when women had waxing performed for hair removal. Because these women were taking isotretinoin at that time, the waxing caused a superficial peeling of the skin. The skin in the areas where the waxing was done was red and raw for a few weeks but did heal. My suggestion would be to not have any waxing, sugaring, or hair removal procedures done while you are taking isotretinoin.

Isotretinoin prescriptions are unique. Refills are not allowed. They must be filled within 7 days of the date it is written or the pharmacist cannot honor it. Please take your prescription to the pharmacy immediately, even if you have some left at home.

I am sure you will be very pleased with the results of the isotretinoin (Accutane) treatment. By following the simple measures above, these bothersome side effects are easy to live with and should not interfere with your day-to-day activities. Other potential rarer side effects will be discussed separately.