

ISOTRETINOIN

(AC CUTANE, CLARUS, EPURIS)

Things to know about isotretinoin

Isotretinoin is a medication that is prescribed for severe, scarring or unresponsive acne. In standard doses, the time course is usually 6 months. At low-dose, the time course is usually longer (6-12 months). Most patients' acne improves and even clears completely with treatment. Sometimes the acne looks a bit worse in the first 7-10 days before it gets better. About 20% of patients have acne that comes back once off treatment. This can be treated with creams alone or another course of isotretinoin. Isotretinoin is absorbed better when it is taken with food.

What are side-effects with isotretinoin

1. Dry skin and eyes, chapped lips and dry nose (common)

For dry skin, use a sensitive skin moisturizer ("non-comedogenic" moisturizer with SPF30 in the morning) at least 2 times a day

For dry eyes, use artificial tears. At times, night vision can be blurred (so be careful when you are driving at night!)

For chapped lips, use petrolatum-based lip balms. Avoid anything medicated

For dry nose (and nosebleeds), use a small amount of vaseline in the nose at bedtime

2. Increased sun sensitivity (common)

Make sure you cover up, seek the shade or use plenty of sunscreen in the summer months

3. Increased liver enzymes, blood fats and cholesterol (dose-dependent)

Does not produce any symptoms and goes up and down with the dose

Monthly lab work is done in patients on standard dose (greater than 40 mg a day) and optional in low dose (40 mg or lower)

4. Bone, muscle and tendon aches (uncommon)

Stretching before and after exercise helps relieve the aches

5. Serious birth defects or miscarriage (important)

High chance of problems with the fetus if you get pregnant while taking the medication or for 1 month after you take your last dose.

Once you have been off isotretinoin for at least 30 days, there is no effect on the baby. DO NOT get pregnant while taking isotretinoin.

6. If you experience these, tell me right away (you can call or email joseph.lam@cw.bc.ca)

- Changes in your mood (including anxiety, depressive symptoms or suicidal thoughts)
- A bad headache, blurred vision or unexplained dizziness
- If you get pregnant (please don't get pregnant!)
- Unusual tummy pain or red/black/tar-like poops
- Worsening acne that doesn't get better after the first 2 weeks

Other things to know

- Let me know if you take other medications (even over-the-counter supplements), especially "tetracyclines", vitamin A and seizure medications (phenytoin)
- You need to wait until 1 month after stopping the medicine if you are planning to get pregnant or donate blood. You need to wait 6 months after stopping the medicine if you are planning to use cosmetic procedures on the skin like waxing, dermabrasion or laser procedures.