



# ISOTRETINOIN (AC CUTANE)

This is the **most effective medication** for acne. It is the only medication that leads to lasting improvement even after you stop taking it.

*However, since it causes severe birth defects, the FDA requires patients to be enrolled in the iPledge program to take this medication.*



## iPledge Program

This program requires that females who are sexually active choose 2 forms of **birth control** and come in for **monthly visits**. For females (unless post-menopausal or post-hysterectomy), you have to wait one month to start the medication because iPledge requires 2 negative pregnancy tests at least 1 month apart. Males also have to come in monthly and agree **not to share their medication** with anyone or donate blood while on accutane.

## POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS:

### DRY SKIN/CHAPPED LIPS

This is the most common side effect. A lot of people also get eczema on their arms and hands.

### DEPRESSION/ SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Studies have shown a link between isotretinoin and depression. However, several newer studies have not supported that link and some studies actually show improvement in depression. I will ask you about symptoms of depression and, if you feel that your depression is worsening, please stop the medication and let me know. If you have suicidal thoughts, seek medical attention immediately.

### DRY NOSE/DRY EYES

Some patients get nosebleeds. Vaseline and sleeping with a humidifier can help. Let me know if you develop blurry vision or headaches in addition to dry eyes. In some patients it can affect night vision, so be cautious when driving at night at first.

### SUNBURN

You will sunburn much more easily while on accutane. Wear sunscreen and sun protective clothing and seek shade where possible. Re-apply sunscreen every 1-2 hours.

### MUSCLE ACHES/ JOINT PAIN

Fairly common, usually mild. The more active you are, the more likely you are to experience these. Usually worst in the first month and improve over time.

### LABS

There are two labs that become mildly elevated in most patients while on the medication and then return to normal after you stop the medication. One is from the liver or muscle and the other is lipids (fats in the blood). These rarely cause problems but we check to be safe and to make sure the labs stay within acceptable levels.

## HOW TO TAKE THE MEDICATION:

- The medication is absorbed much better if taken with something oily. I recommend taking it with dinner. If you are taking 2 pills a day, I recommend taking both of them at the same time (with dinner). This makes it harder to forget doses.
- Do not take tetracycline, doxycycline, minocycline, or vitamin A while you are on accutane.
- Go gentle on your skin while on isotretinoin. I recommend a gentle face wash (e.g. Cetaphil or Neutrogena Hydroboost, but really any facial moisturizer is okay), and chapstick or Vaseline for the lips. Don't use any irritating face washes/acne products during the course.