

# Rosacea

## What is rosacea?

Rosacea is a skin problem that affects the nose and face. It causes redness, pimples, and lumps. Blood vessels become more visible. Sometimes the nose gets larger and looks misshapen.

Rosacea can happen at any age. It's most often seen in adults who are fair-skinned between the ages of 30 and 50.

## What is the cause?

The cause of rosacea is not well understood. It seems to run in families and so may be inherited. It may be caused by overactive blood vessels in the skin. Contrary to popular belief, rosacea is not related to the pimples and cysts of acne. But people who have rosacea may also have acne. Acne and rosacea are often treated with the same medicines.

There are several known triggers for making rosacea worse, including:

- Excess sunlight
- Emotional stress
- Drinking alcohol (Rosacea is not caused by alcoholism, but some people with rosacea find that drinking alcohol can make their rosacea worse.)
- Other foods and beverages, which vary from person to person

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Red bumps on your face
- Red face with pimples
- A red nose
- Visible blood vessel patterns on the nose

In women, redness and blood vessels may appear only on the cheeks and chin.

Over time the surface of the nose may become lumpy and look swollen. The nose can become quite enlarged, and its surface may thicken with scar tissue.

Sometimes rosacea causes red and swollen eyelids. Rarely, the surface of the eyes may be affected, causing a sense of burning and grittiness.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine your skin. This is usually all that is needed to make the diagnosis.

## How is it treated?

Treatment of rosacea is very important because if it is not treated, it usually gets worse over time and can permanently damage facial tissues.

Rosacea is usually treated first with antibiotics. Some of these medicines are taken by mouth. Others are put on the skin.

If rosacea is affecting your eyes, your provider may prescribe antibiotic medicine for your eyes. You may be referred to an eye doctor.

For more severe cases of rosacea, an oral medicine called isotretinoin may be prescribed. Women must use this medicine very carefully. **Isotretinoin causes birth defects if a woman takes it 1 to 2 months before she gets pregnant or during pregnancy.**

A medicine called Finacea (azelaic acid) may be prescribed for rosacea. It is a gel medicine for acne that can be put on your skin.

Steroid creams put on the face can sometimes help. These creams should be used only under the supervision of a healthcare provider even if they are nonprescription. Sometimes the use of steroids for an extended period of time can cause skin damage, especially when they are used incorrectly on the face. Using a steroid for a long time can have serious side effects. Use steroid medicine exactly as your healthcare provider prescribes. Don't use more or less of it than prescribed by your provider and don't use it longer than prescribed. Don't stop using a steroid without your provider's approval. You may have to lower your dosage slowly before stopping it.

If the usual medicines do not help the problem, and especially if your nose is becoming enlarged or deformed, you may need to see a dermatologist. Dermatologists are skin specialists who can suggest other possible treatments, including various types of surgery. In some cases they may do laser surgery. Lasers can often help get rid of enlarged blood vessels on the skin and the enlarged tissues of the nose. The sooner you see a dermatologist, the more effective their treatment is likely to be.

## How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. Use medicines as prescribed.
- Avoid rubbing or massaging your face if it seems to irritate the skin.
- Overexposure to sunlight can worsen the effects of rosacea. Try to stay out of the sun during the times of most intense rays, usually 10 AM to 4 PM. When you are in the sun, always use sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or greater.
- Avoid alcohol if it seems to make your rosacea worse.
- Avoid any other foods or drinks that seem to make the rosacea worse.
- Both men and women with rosacea often use makeup to cover the skin changes. Make sure you avoid using irritating cosmetics.
- Avoid getting hairspray, mousse, and other irritating cosmetics on your face.

- Ask your provider:
  - What activities you should avoid
  - How to take care of yourself at home
  - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.
- You can get more information from:
  - National Rosacea Society  
1-888-NO-BLUSH  
<http://www.rosacea.org>.
  - American Academy of Dermatology  
1-888-462-3376  
<http://www.aad.org>.

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