

Topical Retinoids

The medications we call “retinoids” include products which contain Tretinoin, Adapalene, or Tazarotene. Those are the generic names, but they can be found in a number of brands including Retin-A[®], Differin[®], Tazorac[®], as well as a few others.

These products have a number of benefits, which range from helping to unclog the pores (for Acne patients), all the way to helping to maintain younger, healthier skin cells at the top surface of the skin (for those looking for cosmetic improvement). They can sometimes help in the treatment of Psoriasis as well.

If you are prescribed any of these products, there are a few things you need to know before beginning treatment:

- 1) Even though the directions on the label may say to apply the medication every day, in the very beginning, **you should consider applying it only 2-3x/week for the first few weeks.** These products are notorious for causing irritation in the form of redness and peeling, but given time and careful application, most patients can avoid this. By being careful for the first few weeks, you’re allowing your skin time to get used to the medication and generally the irritation will be minimal. After the first week or two, you can *gradually* add extra days of use per week, until eventually your skin can tolerate daily application.
- 2) The general rule of thumb is that a **“pea-sized” amount should be enough to treat the entire face** - using more than this can increase the likelihood of irritation. You should apply it to dry skin to avoid excess irritation. Mixing it with just a little bit of bland facial moisturizer (Cetaphil[®], Cerave[®], etc.) is OK if it helps you to spread it easier.
- 3) **Avoid highly sensitive areas such as the eyelids, corners of the mouth, and creases around the nose** (unless directed otherwise by your physician). These areas are so sensitive that your skin may never fully acclimate to using them there.
- 4) **These products *may* increase your sensitivity to the sun.** For the average patient, going to school or work (and indoors most of the day), this is not a significant concern. However, if you’re using one of these products on your face and you’ll be spending any significant time outdoors, you should consider using a sunblock-containing face lotion in the morning. All of the top manufacturers such as Oil of Olay[®], Neutrogena[®], Cetaphil[®], and Cerave[®] make SPF-containing face lotions. If you use one, just remember *it usually should be applied to your skin last*, after you’ve applied any medications to your skin (whether one of these topical “retinoids” or any other medication).