



Manhattan Beach Dermatology

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HOW TO USE TOPICAL RETINOID MEDICATIONS

How to start:

Topical retinoid-containing medications can initially cause skin irritation (redness, flaking, burning) in many individuals. Proper use of the medication, as well as other strategies, can reduce the risk of irritation and minimize skin dryness. It is recommended to start using the medication twice a week, and slowly increase the frequency of use to daily or every other day use. Increasing the frequency of use by one additional day per week is a conservative approach, as skin irritation is often delayed and develops several days after application of the medication. Medication should be applied once a day, in the evening.

How to apply:

1. Wash the skin with cool or lukewarm water. Do not use hot water.
2. Cleanse the skin with a non-detergent gentle cleanser using your hands. Gently pat the skin dry. (Do not use cleansers containing benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid initially if your skin is sensitive.)
3. Wait 20 minutes after washing the skin before applying the medication.
4. Apply a pea-sized amount of medication to the entire face by dotting it around the face and then connecting the dots with fingertips. Avoid application near the eyes, lips, and corners of the nose if these areas are prone to dryness.
5. Apply a non-comedogenic moisturizer after the retinoid medication is applied.
6. Avoid astringents, toners, and abrasive products.

If you are experiencing dryness, peeling, or skin burning:

- Decrease the frequency of use until the sensitivity goes away
- Apply moisturizer both before and after the application of the retinoid product
- You may wash the medication off using a gentle cleanser after 1 hour of contact on the skin, and then apply moisturizer
- If irritation is severe, stop the retinoid medication and wait until it resolves completely before restarting it
- Note that retinoid medication may make the skin more red and sun-sensitive, so use a daily moisturizer containing sunscreen.
- Not recommended for use if pregnant or considering becoming pregnant in the near future.