

# Acne treatment in those with acute porphyria

## Summary

Most topical medicines are safe for those with acute porphyria. Special care should be taken with medications impacting the haem pathway.

The information below is adapted from the following sources: [NICE Clinical Knowledge Summary \(CKS\)](#) and [the Norwegian Porphyria Centre drug database](#).

## Acute porphyrias

The porphyrias are a group of conditions caused by altered activity of enzymes within the haem pathway, resulting in the accumulation of porphyrins in the blood. The porphyrias are clinically categorised as either acute or cutaneous.

This advice is for people with acute porphyria, including:

- acute intermittent porphyria [AIP]
- variegate porphyria [VP]
- hereditary coproporphyria [HCP]
- aminolevulinatase deficiency porphyria [ADP]

People with acute porphyria are at risk of developing acute attacks. These acute neurovisceral crises usually start with severe pain (typically in the abdomen, back or legs) followed by other features of autonomic, peripheral or central nervous system dysfunction. Attacks can be triggered by known risk factors, including specific medications.

## Topical medication use in acute porphyria

For a person with acute porphyria, various factors influence the selection of the most suitable treatment for a condition. These include age, sex, and history of acute attacks.

Topical medicines are not absorbed as well as oral ones. Therefore, the use of topical medicines is usually considered safer than oral medicines in acute porphyria, provided they are not applied to broken skin. In acne, however, the skin is more likely to be broken so more of the topical medicine may be absorbed than if the skin was intact.

Guidance on the treatment of acne for those with acute porphyria can be taken from a porphyria specialist or the [UKPMIS](#).

## Safe treatment options for acne in acute porphyria

### Mild to moderate acne

The following can be used to treat mild to moderate acne in those with an acute porphyria:

- topical adapalene with topical benzoyl peroxide
- topical tretinoin with topical clindamycin
- topical benzoyl peroxide with topical clindamycin

Alternatively, topical benzoyl peroxide can be used by itself if the individual prefers or if the above options are contraindicated.

### Moderate to severe acne

The following can be used to treat moderate to severe acne in those with an acute porphyria:

- topical adapalene with topical benzoyl peroxide
- topical tretinoin with topical clindamycin

Alternatively:

- topical adapalene and topical benzoyl peroxide with an oral antibiotic e.g. lymecycline or doxycycline

Topical benzoyl peroxide can be used by itself if the individual prefers or if the above options are contraindicated.

There is limited information regarding use of oral isotretinoin in acute porphyria. If oral use is indicated and cannot be avoided, the risks and benefits to the individual patient should be considered and the patient should be carefully monitored.

### Acne treatments to avoid

1. **Oral contraceptives:** oestrogens and progestogens are known to induce attacks. More information on hormonal therapies for people with acute porphyria can be found [here](#).
2. **Oral erythromycin**
3. **Trimethoprim**
4. **Topical azelaic acid:** only consider where above choices are ineffective or not tolerated. Justify the need for the drug and seek advice from a porphyria expert.

Not all of the acne treatments mentioned in the NICE CKS are suitable for people with acute porphyria. However, completely avoiding these may not be the best approach. A risk-benefit

analysis should be considered with the individual patient in mind when prescribing in porphyria.  
Collaboration with a specialist porphyria information centre is recommended.

Mae'r daflen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This leaflet is also available in Welsh.