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Retinoid Patient Information Sheet

Retinoids are widely prescribed for acne and to help improve the appearance of sun damaged skin. There are many topical retinoids on the market and include brand names such as Tazorac, Differin, Retin A-Micro, Avita, Tretinoin, Renova and Avage. They can be very irritating if used inappropriately. Here are several tips to help make the irritation less of a problem when you first start using a retinoid.

- Use initially twice a week, for example, Monday and Thursday nights.
- Gently wash your face using cool to lukewarm water and a cleanser designed for sensitive skin. Use your fingertips to clean your face. Avoid using a washcloth or other scrubbing implement. Don't use washes that have particulate matter in them, or products designed to exfoliate your skin. Avoid washing your face more than twice daily. Water alone can be used in the mornings if your skin is very dry.
- Apply a later of moisturizing lotion after washing your face and wait 10 minutes before you use your medication.
- Use a pea-size amount of your prescribed retinoid. Dot the medication over your face and distribute it evenly. Take care to avoid your eyelids, lips, and the edge of your nose. Do not rub the medication in vigorously.
- If you experience irritation around your lips, nose, or eyelids, put a little Aquaphor or Vaseline on these areas before you apply the medication.
- You will likely experience some dryness of your skin with mild scaling or peeling, especially on your chin and around the nose. Cheeks can become sensitive, so apply lotions and make-up gently. Make sure you use enough moisturizer in the morning and throughout the day to keep scaling to a minimum. When starting retinoid therapy, products with alpha-hydroxy acids and salicylic acids can sting when applied to your face. Wait until the irritation phase is over before using these products.
- Your skin will "toughen up" as you use the retinoid for a couple of weeks. When you are no longer experiencing uncomfortable dryness, begin using the medication three times a week, for example Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. After a couple of weeks of using the retinoid 3 days a week, try using it every other night and then nightly as tolerated. Some people will find that they can use the medication every night in a short period of time, while others will never be able to use the retinoid nightly. This is OK, several nights a week is better than none!
- Do NOT use retinoid products if you are pregnant.
- Remember to be careful with sun exposure, use sunscreen every day. Use a lotion with an SPF of at least 15 in the daytime because retinoids can make you sun-sensitive and lower your threshold for sunburn.
- Retinoids will make your face more sensitive to certain cosmetic procedures such as chemical peels, lasers, or waxing. Avoid using retinoids for 3 weeks prior to having these procedures done. In case of microdermabrasion or IPL, avoid the use of retinoids for 1 week before and after these procedures.