Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Tretinoin (Topical

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

## Brand Names: US

Altreno; Atralin; Avita [DSC]; Refissa [DSC]; Renova; Renova Pump; Retin-A; Retin-A Micro Pump; Retin-A Micro [DSC]

## Brand Names: Canada

Retin-A; Retin-A Micro; Stieva-A [DSC]

## What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat pimples (acne).
- It is used on the face to treat wrinkles, skin spots, and skin that feels rough.

## What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If your skin is sunburned, sensitive to light, or you have any other skin problems.
- If you are taking any drugs that may make your skin more sensitive to light. There are many drugs that can do this. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- If you are pregnant.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

## What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- If you are allergic to fish, talk with your doctor. Some products have fish protein.
- It may take several weeks to see the full effects.
- Do not use more than what your doctor told you to use. Do not use more often or longer than what you were told. Doing any of these things may raise the chance of very bad side effects.
- Do not put on sunburned skin.
- Do not put on cuts, scrapes, eczema, or damaged skin.
- Practice good skin care and avoid the sun.
- You may get sunburned more easily. Avoid sun, sunlamps, and tanning beds. Use sunscreen and lip balm with an SPF of 15 or more when you are outside. Wear clothing and eyewear that protects you from the sun.
- Some weather conditions like cold and wind may irritate the skin. Talk with the doctor or pharmacist about how to protect the skin.
- Avoid contact with the peels of limes.
- Use of other skin products while using this drug may cause more irritation.
- Talk with your doctor before you use other drugs or products on your skin. This includes soaps.

- You may use moisturizer if this drug causes dry skin. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about what kind of moisturizer to use.
- You may use make-up unless your doctor has told you not to. If you will be using make-up, clean the area to be treated before putting this drug on.
- This drug may cause harm if swallowed. If this drug is swallowed, call a doctor or poison control center right away.
- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take it while you are pregnant. If you think you may be pregnant or plan to become pregnant while taking this drug, call your doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about any risks to your baby.

## What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Skin reaction that is very bad, bothers you, or does not go away.

## What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Feeling of warmth.
- Burning or stinging.
- Change in color of skin.

- Some skin reactions may happen with this drug. These include dry skin, redness, swelling, blisters, and peeling. If these skin reactions happen, talk with your doctor. Your doctor may want you to stop using this drug for some time, change how much you use, or change how often you use this drug.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

## How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

### All products:

- Do not take this drug by mouth. Use on your skin only. Keep out of your mouth, nose, and eyes (may burn).
- If you get this drug in any of these areas, rinse well with water.
- Some products are to be used at bedtime. For some products it does not matter. Check with the pharmacist about how to use this drug.
- Wash your hands before and after use.
- Wash affected skin and pat dry.
- Use only mild non-medicated soaps to wash the affected area.
- You may need to wait 20 to 30 minutes before use. Check with the pharmacist about how to use this drug.
- Put a thin layer on the affected skin and rub in gently.

### Wrinkle cream:

- Do not wash your face for at least 1 hour after putting on this drug. Do not use other skin products or makeup for at least 1 hour after putting it on.
- Put on a moisturizing sunscreen in the morning (SPF 15 or higher).

### Gel:

- This drug may catch on fire. Do not use near an open flame or while smoking.

## What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not put on 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

## How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

### All products:

- Store at room temperature. Do not freeze.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

### Gel:

- Protect from heat or open flame.

### Pump:

- Store upright with the cap on.

## General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

## Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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