

PREGNANCY

Can I Use Acne Wash While Pregnant?



While you're not destined to develop acne while you're pregnant, if you do, it may worsen at a certain stage. "Acne during pregnancy is very common and can happen in the first, second, and third trimesters," explains Neda Mehr, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and Medical Director at [Pure Dermatology Cosmetic & Hair Center](#) in Newport Beach, CA. "[But] if you are dealing with pregnancy acne, expect that it may increase during the third trimester when androgen [hormone] levels are at their highest."

Fortunately, there are numerous different kinds of acne washes on the market, including gel, cream, and foaming cleansers. The only catch is that while some are pregnancy-safe, others are not. The key to decoding which ones are kosher lies in their ingredient labels and knowing what to look for and what to avoid. ^[3]

Is It Safe to Use Acne Wash During Pregnancy?

Safely treating breakouts with an acne wash while pregnant isn't impossible, but, admittedly, having to be diligent with ingredients in cleansers' formulas can be a challenge—one which you might already be primed for just based on all the other pregnancy limitations you have to follow. Some ingredients should be flat-out off limits while pregnant, while others are deemed safer options.

“Avoid [retinol](#) and [salicylic acid](#) during pregnancy, both of which are staple products for acne-prone skin in non-pregnant people,” cautions Neda Mehr, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and medical director at [Pure Dermatology Cosmetic & Hair Center](#) in Newport Beach, Calif. “There are certain ingredients in many acne cleansers that are absolute no-no's and should be avoided during pregnancy, especially the more common cleansers like salicylic acid.”

Retinoids

Retinols, a type of retinoid, can work wonders on clearing acne for non-pregnant people, and provide a multitude of other skin benefits, but they can pose a significant risk to your unborn baby: birth defects.

“Oral retinols (like [Accutane](#)) are known to be extremely harmful to the growing fetus,” warns Dr. Mehr. “So make sure not to apply them topically to your skin while pregnant.” These include skeletal, cardiovascular, muscular, immune, and neurological malformations, which can cause lifelong challenges for your child, as well as result in miscarriage or premature delivery. ^[4]

Salicylic Acid

The other ingredient that both doctors flagged to avoid in acne wash while pregnant is salicylic acid, a beta-hydroxy acid known for its ability to clean deep down in skin's pores. ^[5]

“While salicylic acid is an excellent topical for acne while non-pregnant, its use for pregnant females is questionable and best to avoid,” Dr. Mehr cautions. Whenever an ingredient falls into the gray area of whether or not it's safe to use while pregnant, it's usually wise to not roll the dice and go with another option that you know for sure won't harm your baby.

Endocrine-Disrupting Chemicals

Often added to skincare like acne washes, but not active ingredients, are a range of ingredients you should also avoid. Dr. Mehr advises against using products that contain known harmful chemicals such as phthalates, parabens, and harsh surfactants. They can disrupt your endocrine system, she cautions, which regulates your hormones involved in reproduction, growth, and metabolism, all of which can be detrimental to your growing infant, as well as your own health.

Benzoyl Peroxide

You can also look for a gentle acne wash with a low percentage of benzoyl peroxide, another acne-fighting ingredient. If you're unsure of exactly how much to look for, ask a healthcare provider how much would be suitable for your unique skin and situation. ^[7]

However, keep in mind that when it comes to glycolic acid and benzoyl peroxide, it's an either/or situation. Dr. Mehr advises against using them both at the same time, since they're both acne treatments and, therefore, have the potential to over-dry your skin.