L'ORÉAL
Dermatological Beauty

CLINICAL SERIES

ACNECEUTICALS: BRIDGING PRESCRIPTION ACNE THERAPY AND COSMETIC SKINCARE

WHEN PATIENTS CREATE ACNE REGIMENS GUIDED BY ONLINE INFLUENCERS

No matter how effective prescription treatments are for acne, the clinical reality is that patients seek nonprescription routes for a sense of control and often navigate a landscape of social media trends and internet advice that can be ineffective or potentially harmful.[1-3] Patients conduct this search without clinical guidance, assembling regimens recommended by online influencers and with products that frequently fail and can delay or circumvent prescribed treatments.[1-3] These delays in effective treatment and clinical oversight increase the risk of permanent scarring and post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.[2]

THE ACNECEUTICALS FRAMEWORK

Dermatologists needed a way to bridge the gap between over-the-counter (OTC) products and prescription therapies, creating a framework to guide patients toward evidence-based options across the entire treatment spectrum.[1] In 2023, a dermatologists-led modified consensus process introduced the term **acneceuticals** to describe nonprescription product containing FDA-monographed ingredients with demonstrated ability to alter the structure and function of acneic skin with clinical studies to substantiate their efficacy.[1] Subsequent consensus efforts expanded this framework into practical treatment algorithms and real-world clinical applications.[2,3]

Acneceuticals are acne-centric formulations designed to alter the structure and function of acneic skin through active ingredients vetted by clinical data.[1] The consensus organized these actives into five primary mechanisms of action: keratolytic, sebum reduction, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and barrier repair, allowing clinicians to select products strategically based on pathophysiologic targets.[1]

Examples of acneceuticals include salicylic acid and LHA (keratolytic), niacinamide and zinc (sebum reduction and anti-inflammatory), and ceramides (barrier repair).[1]

MECHANISM OF ACTION	CLINICAL GOAL
Keratolytic	Reduce follicular plugging and hyperkeratinization[1]
Sebum reduction	Decrease oil production[2]
Anti-inflammatory	Reduce erythema and inflammatory response[1,2]
Antibacterial	Modulate microbiome and *C. acnes*[2]
Barrier repair	Restore stratum corneum and reduce TEWL[1]

THREE STRATEGIC APPLICATIONS IN ACNE MANAGEMENT

ACNECEUTICALS ALGORITHM: INTEGRATING ACNECEUTICALS ACROSS THREE THERAPEUTIC SITUATIONS

A consensus-based algorithm stratifies the integration of these products into three distinct therapeutic roles: monotherapy, adjunctive therapy, and maintenance therapy.[2] Monotherapy is positioned for patients with mild disease or those unable to access prescription care due to cost or insurance barriers.[2,3] Adjunctive therapy pairs acneceuticals with pharmacologic agents to augment efficacy or mitigate barrier damage caused by retinoids, whereas maintenance therapy uses these nonprescription actives to sustain remission and prevent relapse after the discontinuation of prescription drugs.[1,2,4] This framework provides dermatologists with evidence-based tools to personalize acne care while addressing cost, tolerability, and access barriers that often derail treatment.[1-3]

"That prescription made my face really dry and irritated, so I stopped using it."
That's common with some acne medications. They can irritate your skin, especially at first, but they work. Let's add a cleanser and moisturizer with ceramides and niacinamide. They help repair your skin barrier and reduce the dryness and redness. Studies show this can help keep your acne treatment working while reducing irritation.[1,2,5]

EVIDENCE FROM CONTROLLED TRIALS AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

Clinical trials support this integrated approach. In a double-blind, randomized study, adding ceramide-containing cleanser and moisturizer to retinoid/benzoyl peroxide therapy maintained significantly lower transepidermal water loss at all timepoints and statistically lower dryness scores through 12 weeks compared to controls.[5] Real-world case series in 10 patients demonstrate that structured acneceutical regimens improve outcomes in those previously unable to tolerate prescription retinoids, with patients achieving lesion reduction and reporting they no longer needed prescription products.[3] These strategies may be particularly relevant for patients with skin of color, where minimizing irritation is an important consideration given the potential for post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation and scarring.[3]

"I've been using products I found on TikTok. Do I really need a prescription?"
Not necessarily, especially if your acne is mild. But the products on TikTok might not have ingredients that actually treat acne. Let me recommend ones with salicylic acid, niacinamide, and ceramides. They're available without a prescription, but contain active ingredients that target key drivers of acne such as clogged pores, oiliness, inflammation, bacteria (specifically C. acnes), and barrier dysfunction, rather than simply masking the appearance of lesions.[1,2]

ACNECEUTICALS AS A SKINCARE ECOSYSTEM STRATEGY

Together, these findings establish acneceuticals as essential tools for managing treatment barriers and optimizing outcomes for acne patients across the skincare ecosystem.

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