

Optimized Regimen

Case summary with assessment

Educational decision-support output — not a medical diagnosis

- **Assessment:** Mild ongoing acne (comedonal + occasional inflammatory pimples) with **post-acne hyperpigmentation (PIH)** on cheeks.
- **Key obstacles:** **No sunscreen**, prior **tretinoin irritation**, and **heavy cold cream** (can clog pores in oily/acne-prone skin).

Recommendations

Step-by-step actionable regimen (AM/PM), monitoring, red flags, and follow-up

Plan (8-12 weeks)

AM

1) **Cleanser (gentle):** use a mild face wash (avoid harsh scrubs). If you want an acne option, use a **0.5-2% salicylic acid** cleanser **3-4x/week** only (not daily if it dries). 2) **Azelaic acid (for spots + acne):** apply **azelaic acid 10-15%** thin layer to cheeks/whole face.

- Start **once daily**; if stinging, use **on alternate mornings** for 1 week then increase. 3) **Sunscreen (non-negotiable):** **SPF 50, PA++++ gel** sunscreen, **2-finger amount** for face/neck; reapply if outdoors.
- Examples (India): Acne UV Gel / Photostable Acne / Sunstop Acne Gel (any similar non-comedogenic SPF 50 is fine).

PM

1) **Cleanser:** gentle cleanse. 2) **Adapalene (better tolerated than tretinoin):** **adapalene 0.1% gel**.

- **Weeks 0-2:** 2 nights/week (pea-sized for full face; avoid corners of nose, lips, eyelids).
- **Weeks 2-4:** alternate nights.
- **Weeks 4-8+:** nightly if comfortable.
- Use the **“moisturizer sandwich”** if you get irritation: moisturizer → adapalene → moisturizer. 3) **Moisturizer (only if needed):** switch from Nivea cold cream to a **light gel, non-comedogenic** moisturizer.

Spot treatment (only on active pimples)

- **Benzoyl peroxide 2.5%** very thin layer on pimples **once daily for 3-5 days**.
 - If irritation occurs, use it **as short-contact therapy**: keep for **30-60 minutes then wash off**.

What to stop/avoid

- Stop **Nivea cold cream** on the face.
- Avoid scrubs, lemon/DIY acids, frequent facials while starting adapalene.

Monitoring & follow-up

- Expect **new acne reduction** in ~4-6 weeks; **PIH fading** often takes **8-12+ weeks** (faster with strict sunscreen).
- Track: (1) new pimples/week, (2) irritation (burning/peeling), (3) darkness of marks.
- **Follow up at 6-8 weeks** to adjust strength/frequency.

When to see a dermatologist sooner

- If you start getting **deep painful lumps again**, scarring, or acne increases.

- If marks become **patchy/symmetric** (melasma-like) or you develop **itchy/raised** marks.

Caution

Prescription drugs & OTC risks • Avoid self-medication • Patch testing • Pregnancy/lactation safety

- **Adapalene and benzoyl peroxide can irritate** early (dryness, burning, peeling). Start slowly; use moisturizer; reduce frequency if needed.
- **Benzoyl peroxide can bleach fabrics** (towels/pillowcases) and may cause contact allergy (rare).
- **Do not use retinoids (adapalene/tretinoin) if pregnant/trying to conceive.** If pregnancy status changes, stop and ask a clinician.
- Introduce only **one new product every ~5-7 days** and **patch test** (jaw/behind ear) if you have a history of reactions.
- Prescription products should ideally be confirmed with an in-person clinician, especially if acne becomes painful/nodular or scarring appears.

Rationale

Why these recommendations were selected

- **Sunscreen** is essential for PIH; without it, spots persist and darken.
- **Azelaic acid** helps both acne inflammation and PIH with relatively good tolerability in oily skin.
- **Adapalene** prevents clogged pores and new acne (therefore prevents new spots) and is often **better tolerated** than tretinoin when started gradually.
- **Stopping heavy occlusive creams** reduces comedones in oily/acne-prone skin.

Alternative / Backup Plans

Other options / contingencies

Alternatives to keep in mind if response is inadequate, intolerance occurs, or special situations apply

- If azelaic acid stings too much: use it **2-3x/week** for 2 weeks, then increase; or switch to **niacinamide 4-5%** serum AM.
- If adapalene still irritates despite slow-start: use **once weekly for 2 weeks** then increase, or pause 5-7 days and restart with sandwich method.
- If you start getting **2-5 new inflamed pimples/week** consistently: consider adding a **fixed adapalene + benzoyl peroxide** gel (night) or a short dermatologist-supervised course of topical antibiotic + BPO.

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