

# DERMATITIS, CONTACT



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A common skin disorder caused by substances that irritate the skin or cause an allergic skin reaction. When an irritant causes the dermatitis, the symptoms usually begin right after exposure. With an allergen-caused dermatitis, the symptoms may take several hours or more to develop. Contact dermatitis can not be spread from one person to another. It occurs in people of all ages and affects women more than men.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Itching and swelling of the skin.
- Slight redness in milder cases.
- Bright red weeping areas in some cases.
- Blisters that break open and ooze, crust, or scale.
- Swelling of face, eyes, genital area (severe allergy)

### CAUSES

- There are many causes of contact dermatitis. It may take time and effort to find the exact cause for each person, and sometimes, the cause is not found. Sometimes the causes may be from a mix of allergens and irritants, especially dermatitis on the hands.
- Irritants include soaps, detergents, bleaches, cleaners; bromine or chlorine used in swimming pools. Also, some oils, tars, a variety of plants including poinsettia, and numerous other items.
- Allergic reaction may come from nickel (found in earrings, rings, and watches); glues; household cleansers; leather; paints; latex (in balloons, rubber bands, elastic waist bands); chemicals (in hair dyes, perfumes, deodorants, and cosmetics); plants such as poison ivy, oak, or sumac; and numerous other possibilities.
- Reaction to topical drugs such as antibiotics or anesthetics.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Ongoing use of hot water, detergents, or any irritant that changes the moisture content of skin.
- Jobs or hobbies that bring you in contact with substances that irritate or cause an allergic reaction.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid contact with any irritant or allergen that has caused dermatitis in the past.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing.
- Protect skin from sunburn and other burns.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Symptoms can usually be controlled with treatment and avoiding the irritant or allergen in the future.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Recurrence is common.
- Bacterial infection or other skin problems may occur.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Treatment most often involves products applied to the skin to relieve the itching, redness, and soreness.
- Reduce water temperature to lukewarm for bathing or other uses. Use Aveeno (a commercial product for soaking). Pat skin dry rather than rubbing it.
- See your health care provider if self-help steps are not working. A skin exam is usually all that is needed for diagnosis. Questions will be asked about any contact with possible irritating and allergic substances to help find the cause. Skin allergy testing may be done.
- Once the cause is known, avoid contact with that substance. Wear protective gloves for wet work. Use petroleum jelly to protect the hands.

### MEDICATIONS

- Use nonprescription cream, lotion, or ointment products to help relieve symptoms. These can add moisture to the skin, have an anti-itching effect, and may include a mild topical anesthetic. Use these skin care products for mild cases. For more severe cases, use 0.5% or 1% hydrocortisone product. Follow label instructions.
- Oral antihistamines may help relieve itching.
- Your health care provider may prescribe:
  - Other topical skin care products. These may include stronger steroid drugs to reduce redness and soreness or lubricants to preserve moisture.
  - Oral (taken by mouth) steroids for severe cases.
  - Antibiotics (topical or oral) for bacterial infections.

### ACTIVITY

No limits.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has contact dermatitis and self-help treatment is not working.
- Signs of infection (swelling, tenderness, redness, warmth) develop at the site of irritation.

Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page