

normal skin that ranges from a faint, transient erythema to massive bullae on an erythematous swollen base. Itching is a constant symptom.

The cause may be a primary irritant or a sensitizing agent. A primary irritant is one that irritates any skin. A sensitizing agent produces an irritation on those individuals who have encountered the irritant or something chemically related to it, have undergone an immunologic change, and have become sensitized. A sensitizer irritates in relatively low concentrations only persons who are allergic to it.

The major goal in treatment is to prevent further exposure of the skin to the offending substance. Provided there is no further irritation, the skin's normal recuperative powers will produce healing without medical treatment. The most frequent offenders are plant and animal irritants (see discussion later). In infants, the most common contact dermatitis occurs on the convex surfaces of the diaper area. Other agents that produce contact dermatitis include animal irritants (wool, feathers, and furs), metal (nickel found in jewelry and the snaps on sleepers and denim), vegetable irritants (oleoresins, oils, and turpentine), pet dander, dyes, cosmetics, perfumes, and soaps (including bubble baths).

Nursing Care Management

Nurses frequently detect evidence of contact dermatitis during routine physical assessments. Skin manifestations in specific areas suggest limited contact, such as around the eyes (mascara), areas of the body covered by clothing but not protected by undergarments (wool), or areas of the body not covered by clothing (ultraviolet [UV] injury). Generalized involvement is more likely to be caused by bubble bath, laundry soap, body soap, or lotion. Often nurses can determine the offending agent and counsel families regarding management. If the lesions persist, are extensive, or show evidence of infection, medical evaluation is indicated.

Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac

Contact with the dry or succulent portions of any of three poisonous plants (ivy, oak, and sumac) produces localized, streaked or spotty, inflamed, oozing, and painful impetiginous lesions that