

Overview

Contact dermatitis

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Contact dermatitis is a type of eczema caused by contact with something that irritates your skin or something you are allergic to.

[Eczema](#) is the name for a group of conditions that cause skin to become dry and irritated.

Contact dermatitis usually improves if you avoid what is causing the problem. Treatments are also available to help ease the symptoms.

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Symptoms of contact dermatitis

Contact dermatitis causes the skin to become itchy, blistered, dry or cracked.

The skin can become inflamed (swollen). Lighter skin can become red. Darker skin can become dark brown, purple or grey.

This reaction usually happens within a few hours or days of contact with the thing that irritates your skin or that you are allergic to.

Symptoms can affect any part of the body but they happen most often on the hands and face.

Read more about [symptoms of contact dermatitis](#)

When to see a pharmacist

Speak to a pharmacist if your contact dermatitis is troubling you. They can recommend treatments such as emollients (moisturisers).

When to see your GP

See your GP if you have repeated or severe symptoms of contact dermatitis. They can try to identify the cause and suggest treatments.

Your GP may refer you to a dermatologist (doctor who specialises in skin conditions) if:

- you cannot identify what is causing your contact dermatitis
- your symptoms do not improve with treatment

Causes of contact dermatitis

The causes of contact dermatitis can include:

- irritants - substances that damage the outer layer of the skin
- allergens - substances that cause the immune system to react in a way that affects the skin

Common causes of contact dermatitis are irritants such as soaps, detergents and solvents. Regular contact with water is also a common cause of contact dermatitis.

Read more about [causes of contact dermatitis](#)

Treating contact dermatitis

If you can avoid the irritants or allergens that cause your symptoms, your skin will clear up.

Because this is not always possible, your GP may recommend that you use:

- emollients - moisturisers that you apply to your skin to stop it from becoming dry
- topical corticosteroids - steroid ointments and creams that you apply to your skin to treat severe symptoms

Your GP may prescribe oral corticosteroids. This treatment is for severe contact dermatitis that covers a large area of your skin.

Read more about [treating contact dermatitis](#)

Preventing contact dermatitis

To prevent contact dermatitis, avoid contact with whatever is causing your symptoms. If you cannot avoid contact, you can take steps to reduce the risk of developing symptoms.

These include:

- cleaning your skin soon after you come into contact with an allergen or irritant
- using gloves to protect your hands
- using different products
- applying emollients often and in large amounts

Read more about [preventing contact dermatitis](#)

Related topic

[Eczema](#)

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