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Erythroderma

Erythroderma is widespread redness of the skin. It is accompanied by scaling, peeling, and flaking of the skin, and may include itching and hair loss.

Causes

Erythroderma may occur due to:

- Complication of other skin conditions, such as eczema and psoriasis
- Reaction to medicines or some chemicals, such as phenytoin and allopurinol
- Some types of cancer, such as lymphoma

Sometimes the cause is unknown. It is more common in males.

Symptoms

Symptoms may include any of the following:

- Redness over 80% to 90% of the body
- Scaly skin patches
- Thickened skin
- Skin is itchy or painful with an odor
- Swelling of the arms or legs
- Fast heart beat
- Loss of fluids, leading to dehydration
- Loss of temperature regulation by the body

There may be secondary infections of the skin.

Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and take your medical history. The provider will do a skin examination with a dermatoscope. Most of the time, the cause can be identified after the exam.

If needed, the following tests may be ordered:

- Biopsy of the skin
- Allergy testing
- Other tests to find the cause of erythroderma

Treatment

Since erythroderma can quickly lead to serious complications, the provider will start treatment right away. This usually involves strong doses of cortisone medicines to reduce inflammation.

Other treatments may include:

- Medicines to treat the underlying cause of erythroderma
- Antibiotics for any infection
- Dressings applied to the skin
- Ultraviolet light
- Correction of fluid and electrolyte balance

Outlook (Prognosis)

In serious cases, the person needs to be treated in the hospital.

Possible Complications

Complications may include:

- Secondary infections that can lead to sepsis (bodywide inflammatory response)
- Fluid loss that can result in dehydration and an imbalance of minerals (electrolytes) in the body
- Heart failure

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider right away if:

- Symptoms get worse or do not get better, even with treatment.
- You develop new lesions.

Prevention

Risk for erythroderma may be reduced by following the provider's instructions on skin care.

Alternative Names

Exfoliative dermatitis; Dermatitis exfoliativa; Pruritus - exfoliative dermatitis; Pityriasis rubra; Red man syndrome; Exfoliative erythroderma

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