

Scratching the Surface on Skin Allergies

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Do you often suffer from red, bumpy, scaly, itchy, inflamed/blistered or swollen skin? Dry skin, sunburn or an insect bite may be the cause. Or, you may have a skin allergy. The most common skin allergies include eczema, hives/angioedema and contact dermatitis.

Eczema

Eczema usually affects the face, elbows and knees. The red, scaly, itchy rash is more common in infants and those who have a history of allergies or asthma. Older children and adults with eczema often experience rashes on the knees or elbows (often in the folds of the joints), on the backs of hands or on the scalp.

Triggers include allergens, overheating or sweating, emotional stress, food and contact with irritants such as wool, pets or soaps.

Preventing the itch and frequent moisturization is the main treatment goal. Applying cold compresses and topical steroid and calcineurin inhibitor creams are the most effective. Antihistamines are often recommended to help relieve the itchiness. In severe cases, oral steroids are prescribed.

DID YOU KNOW?

- About 27% of children who have food allergies also have eczema or skin allergies.
- Contact dermatitis leads to approximately 5.7 million doctor visits each year.
- More than 3,700 substances have been identified as contact allergens.

Hives and Angioedema

Hives are red, itchy, raised areas which may be triggered by food, latex or drug allergies. Hives can also result from non-allergic sources like rubbing of the skin, cold, heat, physical exertion or exercise, pressure and sunlight. Hives usually go away within a few days. Chronic hives can linger for months to years.

Angioedema is a swelling of the deeper skin layers that sometimes occurs with hives. Angioedema appears on the eyelids, lips, tongue, hands and feet and is typically not red or itchy—just swollen.

The allergens that trigger hives may take days to leave the body, so an allergist/immunologist may prescribe antihistamines or in severe cases, steroids. Other tips for symptom relief are cool showers, applying a cool compress or wearing loose/light clothing.

Contact Dermatitis

Contact dermatitis is often more painful than itchy. It is characterized by an itchy, red, blistered reaction from poison ivy, nickel, perfumes, dyes, latex products or cosmetics. Some ingredients in medications can cause a reaction, most commonly neomycin, an ingredient in antibiotic creams.

Allergic contact dermatitis reactions can happen 24 to 48 hours after contact. Once a reaction starts, it takes 14 to 28 days to go away, even with treatment.

Contact dermatitis can be treated by scrubbing the skin with soap and water after exposure and using prescribed antihistamine and cortisone medications. Calamine lotion, oatmeal baths/milk soaks and cool compresses can offer relief.

To the Point

Skin allergies are painful and unpleasant but an allergist/immunologist can relieve symptoms and possibly control them.



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