

Education

Contact Dermatitis: Brief Version

What is contact dermatitis?

You have contact dermatitis when your skin gets a rash after something irritating touches it.

What is the cause?

The skin may touch something that irritates it, like:

- soaps or detergents
- cleaning products
- waxes or polishes.

You may be allergic to something that touches your skin, like:

- hair dyes
- jewelry
- fingernail polish
- deodorants.

Examples of other things that may cause a rash are:

- rubber
- nickel (a metal often present in inexpensive jewelry, belt buckles, and the backs of watches)
- poison ivy.

What are the symptoms?

Your skin may:

- itch
- swell
- look red
- have blisters that may break open and ooze, crust, or scale.

You may even get an infection.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will look at the rash. He or she will ask you:

- When and where did the rash start?
- What did it look like at first?
- What might have touched your skin lately?

How is it treated?

Your health care provider may give you:

- a cream to stop the itching
- medicine to take by mouth for itching
- antibiotic medicine if there is infection.

How long will it take to get better?

Treatment should help your rash get better in a few days.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow your health care provider's advice. It can help if you:

- Do not irritate the rash.
- Stay away from what caused the rash.
- Put cool, moist cloths on the rash.

How can I help prevent it?

If you know what caused the rash:

- Make sure it is not in the makeup, soap, or other products that you use.
- Gently wash your skin right away if you do touch something that irritates it.

Even if you don't know what caused your rash, it can help to follow these suggestions:

- Learn what poison oak, poison ivy, and ragweed look like. Stay away from these plants.
- Use makeup that does not cause allergies. Buy makeup with the word "hypoallergenic" on the label.
- When your skin gets wet, pat it dry. Don't rub it.
- Try not to use chemicals. Wear safe gloves when you have to use chemicals.
- Use a dishwasher or wear gloves when you wash dishes.

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