

HAND DERMATITIS

What is it?

Hand dermatitis (hand eczema is another name for the same thing) is common. Hand rashes usually result from a combination of (1) sensitive skin and (2) irritation or allergy from materials touched. Everyone's hands routinely touch irritating soaps and detergents several times a day. Add the raw foods, solvents, paints, oils, greases, acids, glues, and so on that most of us touch at work or in the home, and you can see that the skin of your hands takes a beating.

Who gets it and why?

Not everyone gets hand dermatitis. Many lucky persons have "tough" skin, but unfortunately some persons have skin that is easily damaged. The result is dermatitis. Persons with hand dermatitis often have dermatitis elsewhere, and frequently blood relatives have hand dermatitis. We cannot toughen your skin, but we have effective treatment to heal your dermatitis.

How is it treated?

Skin protection and gentle care of your hands are important parts of your treatment. The following instructions will help improve your hand condition.

1. Minimize cleansing:

Minimize hand washing, and avoid putting hands in water when possible. All soaps can be irritating. When washing your hands use lukewarm water and very little mild soap such as Dove soap or Cetaphil liquid cleanser

2. Medicate:

Your physician may have prescribed a prescription cream and /or ointment for your hands. When your hands are damp, apply a thin film of the ointment/cream to the involved areas. Your physician and will give you specific instructions regarding the prescription application. Long-term use of cortisone creams/ointments may thin the skin so follow specific instructions. When your hands improve and the redness and dryness are restored discontinue the use of prescription ointments/creams. Continue gentle hand care and the use of hand creams as discussed below.

3. Moisturize:

Apply a bland cream, such as Eucerin Original Formula Cream, Cetaphil Cream, Cerave Cream, Neutrogena Hand Cream or Petrolatum each time you wash your hands and as needed for dryness. Hand lotions such as Eucerin lotion and Cetaphil lotion are easier to apply, but not as effective as the above mentioned creams. Avoid lotions and moisturizers with fragrance as they are often irritating.

4. Protect

Protect your hands from direct contact with soaps, detergents, wet diapers, certain foods such as citrus products and other irritating chemicals by wearing waterproof, heavy-duty vinyl gloves. Heavy-duty vinyl gloves are better than rubber gloves, since you may become allergic to rubber. They should be conveniently kept in kitchen, bathroom, and laundry areas. If a glove develops a hole, discard it immediately. Wearing a glove with a hole is worse than wearing no gloves at all.

Heat and sweat inside your gloves may be as bad for the hands as the irritation of soap and water. Do not put your hands into very hot water even when wearing the vinyl gloves.

We also strongly suggest that you wear cotton liner gloves as they will absorb any sweat and keep your hands drier. Cotton gloves are available from Allerderm (allerderm.com) or are often available at the OTC Pharmacy in MOB West.

Wear leather or heavy-duty fabric gloves when doing dry work and gardening. When they get dirty, put them in the washing machine. Wash your gloves--not your hands.

If you have an automatic dishwasher, use it as much as possible. If you don't let a member of your family do the dishes. Do your laundry by machine, not by hand.

Avoid direct contact with turpentine, paint thinner, paints, and floor, furniture, metal, and shoe polishes. They contain irritating solvents. When using them, wear heavy-duty waterproof gloves.

Rings often worsen dermatitis by trapping irritating materials beneath them. Remove your rings when doing housework and before washing your hands.

When outdoors in cold or windy weather, wear unlined leather gloves to protect your hands from drying and chapping.

Remember hand dermatitis is often a long term problem which may flare up with exposure to irritants and with emotional stress. There is no fast, "magic" treatment for hand dermatitis. Your skin must be given a rest from irritation. Follow these instructions carefully.