

RASHES AND SKIN IRRITATION

What are rashes?

A rash, also called dermatitis, is swelling (puffiness) or irritation of the skin. It might be red, itchy, dry, bumpy, scaly, crusty or blistered. Rashes are a symptom of many different medical conditions. Things that can cause a rash include other diseases, irritating substances, allergies and your genetic makeup. Some rashes develop immediately while others form over several days. If you scratch your rash, it might take longer to heal. 'Contact dermatitis' and 'eczema' are terms that describe common rashes.

What causes rashes?

Dry skin, exposure to poison oak and poison ivy, and pets, food and consumer products all cause rashes. Ingredients in soaps, cosmetics, detergents, dyes, latex, deodorants, fragrances and rubber products can produce skin irritation and rashes. Rashes can also signal a fungal or bacterial infection, or a minor symptom of a more serious medical problem.

What are some common types of rashes?

Common types of rashes are:

- 1.) Eczema, also called atopic dermatitis. Eczema can cause dry, chapped, bumpy areas around the elbows and knees or more serious cases of red, scaly, and swollen skin.
- 2.) Irritant contact dermatitis is caused by contact with something irritating, such as chemicals, soaps, detergents and the sun. Irritant contact dermatitis can be red, swollen and itchy.
- 3.) Allergic contact dermatitis is a rash caused by contact with something you are allergic to, such as rubber, hair dye, or nickel, a metal found in some jewelry. Allergic contact dermatitis can produce a red, scaly, crusty rash. Contact with poison ivy, oak and sumac can cause this rash.

What do to do if you get a rash?

Visit a physician if you have a rash. A dermatologist can determine what caused the rash, and how best to treat it. Do not scratch the rash because it delays healing and an infection or scar could develop.

Should I be concerned about my rash?

Visit a physician or dermatologist if a new rash or skin irritation appears or if you have recurring rashes that last more than a day or two. The provider will pinpoint the cause, treat the rash and determine if it is a sign of a more serious medical condition.

What are the treatments?

Rash treatments include moisturizers, lotions, baths, cortisone creams that relieve swelling, and antihistamines, which relieve itching. For eczema, the physician may suggest moisturizers called emollients that retain water in skin, keeping it smooth while soothing any itch. For poison ivy, physicians may recommend cool showers and calamine lotion, and an antihistamine for severe cases to decrease itching and redness. For rashes caused by an allergen, including hives, the doctor will need to determine which food, substance, medicine, or insect caused the problem. A medical test can determine which allergens are causing trouble.

There are many over-the-counter products for treating simple rashes and skin irritation. Antihistamine creams, anti-itch lotions and moisturizers commonly treat rashes. If a rash persists for more than two or three days, visit a physician who can prescribe an effective treatment.

References and Sources

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