

Allergic contact dermatitis

Contact dermatitis is an itchy rash that is caused by something touching (contacting) your skin. The rash is usually red, bumpy, and itchy. Sometimes there are blisters filled with fluid.

✓ THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF CONTACT DERMATITIS:

1. Some things that contact skin are very irritating and will cause a rash in most people. This rash is called **irritant contact dermatitis**. Examples are acids, soaps, cold weather, and friction.
2. Some things that touch your skin give you a rash because you are allergic to them. This rash is called **allergic contact dermatitis**. These are items that do not bother everyone's skin. They only cause a rash in people who are allergic to those items.

✓ WHAT ARE COMMON CAUSES OF ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS IN CHILDREN AND WHERE ARE THEY FOUND?

- » **Homemade slime:** often irritation (irritant contact dermatitis) results from soap or detergent but can have allergic contact dermatitis to glues and other ingredients
- » **Plants:** poison ivy, poison oak, poison sumac
- » **Metals (especially nickel):** snaps, jewelry, belt buckles, electronics, toys
- » **Antibiotic ointments:** neosporin, bacitracin, mupirocin
- » **Fragrances and flavorings:** lotions, cosmetics, toothpastes, lip balms, foods, drinks, soaps
- » **Preservatives:** creams, lotions, cosmetics, diaper wipes, shampoos
- » **Rubber:** gloves, shoes, sports equipment
- » **Lanolin:** creams, lotions, ointments, lip balms, soaps
- » **Dyes:** clothes, hair colors, tattoos
- » **Adhesives:** glues, tape, shoes, leather goods, crafts, bandages
- » **Essential oils:** including tea tree oil, lavender, and others

✓ WHY DO PEOPLE GET ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS?

People often ask a question like: *"Why am I getting a rash from my favorite earrings now? I have been wearing them for a year with no problem!"* This can be very confusing. The answer is that you are not born with allergies. Allergies start after your body has become familiar with something. This can take days, months, or even years to happen. Thus, allergies appear during childhood and adulthood.

✓ HOW CAN I TELL IF MY RASH IS ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS?

This takes some detective work. Since allergic contact dermatitis is caused by something touching the skin, the rash will usually be only on

COMMON FORMS OF ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS:

>> ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS TO HOMEMADE SLIME

- » Slime is a homemade gooey substance that many young people make and play with.
- » There are several recipes for making slime. Common ingredients include boric acid, contact lens solution, laundry detergent, shaving cream, and school glue. Many ingredients being used can cause irritation ("irritant contact dermatitis") and some can cause allergic contact dermatitis.
- » Children playing with slime may get an itchy rash on their hands. There can be blisters, flaking, peeling, and cracking. The rash can last for weeks or months.

>> ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS TO PLANTS

- » Poison ivy and related plants (poison sumac, poison oak, Japanese lacquer tree) are the most common causes of plant dermatitis.
- » Different parts of North America have different plants in the poison ivy family. Look up which plants are common in your area so that you know how to avoid them.
- » Urushiol in the sap of these plants causes the rash.
- » The sap can stick to clothes or animal fur.
- » If you think poison ivy has touched your skin, carefully wash your skin and clothes completely with soap and water. Pets who have been in poison ivy also need to be washed.

the skin that was touched. And it usually starts at least a few days later. Some examples are:

- » With poison ivy, your rash may be in streaks where the plant brushed across your skin.
- » If you seem to always have a rash under your belly button, it may be from your belt buckle or the snap on your pants.
- » If you are putting antibiotic ointment on a skin injury and an itchy rash starts, that may be an allergic contact dermatitis to the antibiotic ointment.

WHAT IS A PATCH TEST?

If a rash seems like it may be allergic contact dermatitis (it does not go away or it keeps coming back in the same place) but the exact cause is not clear, a **patch test** may help figure out what is causing the rash.

A patch test is a special allergy test to find out if something touching the skin is causing an allergic rash. Tiny amounts of many items are taped to the skin on the back. The back is used because it is a large area. Two days later, the tape is removed and the skin is checked to see if there is a small rash in any of those spots. Sometimes reactions are delayed so the skin is checked again after two or three more days. If the test shows you are allergic to something, that may be what caused your rash. You will be given information on those items including where they are found and how they can be avoided.

COMMON FORMS (CONT):

>> ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS TO NICKEL

- » Nickel is the most common cause of allergic contact dermatitis in children in North America.
- » Nickel is a metal that touches our skin very often. It is in jewelry, sometimes even gold jewelry, and is in watches and watchbands, belt buckles, snaps, keys, scissors, cell phones, silverware, and even some foods.
- » A kit can be purchased (dimethylglyoxime DMG spot test) to test things such as jewelry to see if they contain nickel.
- » If you are allergic to nickel, look for jewelry that might be labeled as "nickel-free" or "hypoallergenic." Nickel-free earrings, for example, usually have stainless steel posts or wires.
- » If the metal snap or button on jeans is causing a rash, sometimes sewing a thick patch over the back of the snap can help to prevent it. Simply keeping a shirt tucked in usually will not help.

HOW IS ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS TREATED?

Treatment depends on how bad the rash is. If the rash is only on small areas of skin, steroid ointments are usually prescribed. If the rash has spread or is severe, oral steroids are sometimes used. Oral antihistamines can help with itching. Many antihistamines are sold over the counter such as diphenhydramine and cetirizine. Others require a prescription.

To prevent the rash from coming back, you must avoid contact with whatever caused the rash. This can be hard but is extremely important. Once you are allergic to something, you will always be allergic to it. The rash can get worse each time it comes back. You can even get a rash all over the body including areas that have not been in contact with what you are allergic to. This is called "autosensitization dermatitis" or "id reaction."



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