

Diagnosing and Managing Sensitive Skin: An Expert's Perspective

This checklist was developed to help healthcare providers screen patients for sensitive skin. Left untreated, sensitive skin can lead to worsening symptoms and discomfort. Use this checklist to help identify possible triggers and irritants and to counsel patients on how to manage their sensitive skin.



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IDENTIFYING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SENSITIVE SKIN

What does sensitive skin actually look like? When your patients present with general skin issues, use this helpful diagnostic tool to evaluate their condition.

SENSITIVE SKIN SIGNS & SYMPTOMS TO CHECK FOR¹

- Red skin with or without swelling.
- Skin that stings or burns.
- Rashes or hives.
- Dry skin that may peel, crack, blister or bleed.
- Patches of skin that feel dry, hard and leathery.

Clinical Recommendations

Taking the time to delve deeper into the patient's workplace, outside environment, and home can help to make the connection between the irritant and their reactive skin.

- Ask questions about the patient's workplace exposures and timing of skin eruption. Asking whether their skin is exacerbated at work and improves away from work can help elucidate triggers.
- Consider laundry products as these are frequently missed as a trigger. Something as simple as clothing and bed sheets washed in fragranced detergents may lead to widespread rashes as these textiles are almost always in contact with the skin.

Tips to avoid irritants include:

- Use a gentle hand cleanser and protect the skin with a fragrance-free moisturizer/barrier cream.
- Closing windows when air pollution levels are high and using an air purifier.
- Wearing soft, protective clothes.
- Wearing protective gloves when cleaning or vacuuming and dusting often.

Take the time to do a series of "elimination" questions to find irritants and remove them from the patient's environment. If there are multiple triggers, it may be helpful to eliminate all of them and slowly reintroduce them one at a time.

IDENTIFYING UNDERLYING CAUSES OF SENSITIVE SKIN

Once a sensitive skin diagnosis has been established, there are three key areas to explore when attempting to identify possible triggers:

1. Occupational triggers:

- ✓ What type of work does the patient do?
- ✓ Are the conditions hot or cold?
- ✓ Is there exposure to water? Is there excessive hand washing?
- ✓ Is there exposure to soaps, solvents, other chemicals, or latex gloves?
- ✓ Does the skin worsen at work and then improve when they are away?

2. Environmental triggers:

- ✓ Does the patient spend a lot of time outdoors (i.e., gardening, camping, hiking)?
- ✓ Does the patient wear sunscreen regularly, and if so, do they use mineral or chemical sunscreens?
- ✓ Does the patient have seasonal allergies?
- ✓ Has the patient recently been exposed to poison ivy, oak, or sumac?

3. Home and personal care triggers:

Home triggers:

- ✓ Does the patient swim in a pool or use a hot tub?
- ✓ Does the patient have any hobbies?
- ✓ Are there pets in the home?
- ✓ What household cleaning products does the patient use?
- ✓ Does the patient do their own laundry or use a laundry service? Is a fragrance-free, dye-free detergent, fabric conditioner, and dryer sheet being used?

Personal Care Triggers:

- ✓ Is the patient using skincare or haircare products with fragrances? If so, which products?
- ✓ Is the patient using skincare products with potentially irritating actives like retinol or glycolic acid?
- ✓ How often does the patient bathe and for how long?
- ✓ When they bathe, does the patient use additives like scrubs or bath bombs?