

What is dermatitis? — Dermatitis is a type of skin rash that can happen after your skin touches something that irritates it or something you are allergic to.

Things that irritate the skin can be found in products you use every day, such as soaps or cleansers. Some of the things that can cause skin allergies include:

- Certain medicines, perfumes, or cosmetics
- The metal in some kinds of jewelry
- Plants, such as poison ivy and poison oak

Sometimes you can develop a rash the first time you touch something. But it is also possible to get a rash from something you have used before without any problems.

What other symptoms should I watch for? — If you have a rash, your skin might be red, dry, itchy, or cracked (picture 1). If your rash is caused by an allergy, you might also have some swelling or blisters where you have the rash.

Severe symptoms include:

- Pain
- Widespread swelling
- Large blisters, oozing, or crusting of the skin

What can I do to get rid of my dermatitis? — You can:

- Avoid using or touching whatever might have caused your rash
- Protect your skin from anything that might irritate it or cause an allergy. For example, wear gloves if you need to work with harsh soaps.
- Try using soothing skin products to help with the itching and discomfort. Things that might help include:
  - Unscented, thick moisturizing cream
  - A special kind of bath called an oatmeal bath

Should I see a doctor or nurse? — See your doctor or nurse if your rash does not go away within 2 weeks, or if it gets worse. Your doctor can help figure out what could be causing your rash.

How are skin rashes treated? — Your doctor might prescribe different treatments or medicines to help your rash. These can include:

- Steroid creams and ointments — These are not the same as the steroids some athletes take illegally. They go on the skin, and they relieve itching and redness.
- Steroid pills — You might need to take these for a short time if your rash is severe. But your doctor or nurse will want to take you off steroid pills as soon as possible. Even though these medicines help, they can also cause problems of their own.
- Wet or damp dressings — These can be helpful for skin that is crusting or oozing. To use a wet or damp dressing, you will need to wear 2 layers of clothing. First, you put on a layer of damp cotton clothes over your rash. Then, you put on a layer of dry clothes on top of the damp ones. People who need these dressings often wear them at night when they sleep.