

# Itching Symptom - Widespread

## Definition

- Itching all over the skin.

## Health Information

### Symptoms

- Skin feels itchy.
- It can also be dry, rough, or red.

### Causes

- **Dry skin.** Dry skin is the most common cause of itchy skin. More common in winter. Reason: low humidity in heated homes. For details, see the Dry Skin handout.
- **Irritants.** Many chemicals can irritate the skin. Common irritants are soaps, detergents, bubble bath, insect repellent, or sunscreen. Preservatives or fragrances in these products are often the culprits.
- **Chlorine.** This chemical in swimming pools and hot tubs can make skin itchy.
- **Allergies.** Common triggers are pollen and animal dander.
- **Infections.** Certain viruses will cause itchy rashes. The rashes are small pink spots all over the body. They often come with other symptoms like fever, runny nose, or diarrhea. A doctor can diagnose these viral rashes. For details, see the specific viral rash handout.
- **Eczema.** Skin is dry, red and itchy. Symptoms can flare up with food allergies or other allergic substances. A doctor can make this diagnosis. For details, see the Eczema handout.

## Care Advice

### 1. Key Points

- Dryness, irritants, or allergies most often cause itchy skin.
- Here's some home care advice that should help.

### 2. Clean the Itchy Skin

- For new itching or flare-ups, give your child a quick bath or shower. Reason: to remove any irritants.
- Use a mild soap this one time. Reason: the irritant may be sticky. After this, avoid using soap until the itch is better.
- Wash the hair. Reason: irritants collect there.
- Avoid all harsh soaps (especially bubble bath) for bathing. Reason: soaps remove natural oils from the skin.

### 3. Avoid Triggers

- **Soaps.** Avoid all harsh soaps (especially bubble bath). Young children don't need to use any soap. Teens only need soap for washing the armpits, groin, and feet.
- **Swimming.** Shower right after swimming in a pool or soaking in a hot tub. Then apply a moisturizing cream.
- **Clothing.** Avoid itchy clothing (especially wool). Avoid harsh or scented detergents.

### 4. Try Not to Scratch

- Encourage your child not to scratch.
- Cut fingernails short. Reason: to prevent small scratches that can lead to a skin infection.

## 5. **Treat Dry Skin**

- Run a humidifier if your home is dry.
- Apply a moisturizing cream to skin after baths or showers. Pick a cream without preservatives or fragrances.
- Bathe less often. Avoid soaps. Reason: soaps remove natural oils from the skin.

## 6. **Allergy Medicine**

- If needed, give an allergy medicine by mouth to help with widespread itching.
- Long-acting allergy medicines, such as cetirizine (Zyrtec), are most helpful. Follow package instructions for dosing. Do not give cetirizine to children younger than 6 months old.
- You may also try Benadryl. Follow package instructions for dosing. Do not give Benadryl to children younger than 1 year old.
- These medicines are over the counter (OTC). No prescription is needed.

## 7. **Steroid Cream**

- You can apply 1% hydrocortisone to the most itchy areas. Apply twice a day as needed.
- Caution: Steroid creams are not safe to use on the whole body.
- Steroid creams are not helpful for itchy skin from infections or allergic reactions.

## 8. **Return to School**

- Most causes of itchy skin are not contagious. It's safe to be around other people.
- If itching is caused by a virus, follow your doctor's instructions for returning to school.

## 9. **What To Expect**

- Itching should go away within a few days.
- Itching may come back if you have contact with the trigger again.

## **Call Your Doctor If**

- Itching becomes severe
- Itching lasts more than 7 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

## **Pediatric Care Advice**

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