



HAND PROTECTION FOR HAND ECZEMA

Hand eczema (hand dermatitis is another name for the same thing) is common. Hand rashes usually result from a combination of (1) sensitive skin and (2) irritation or allergy from materials touched. Everyone's hands routinely touch irritating soaps and detergents several times a day. Add the raw foods, solvents, paints, oils, greases, acids, glues, and so on that most of us touch at work or in the home, and you can see that the skin of your hands takes a beating.

Not everyone gets hand dermatitis. Many lucky persons have "tough" skin, but unfortunately some persons have skin that is easily damaged. The result is dermatitis. Persons with hand dermatitis often have dermatitis elsewhere, and may have relatives with dermatitis. We cannot toughen your skin, but we have effective treatment to heal your dermatitis.

Skin protection is an important part of treatment. This instruction sheet gives you detailed directions on how to protect your hands.

1. Minimize hand washing, and avoid putting hands in water when possible. All soaps can be irritating. When washing your hands use lukewarm water and no soap. If you need soap use a small amount of a mild soap. Examples are:

- Dove Unscented Soap®
- Cetaphil Cleansing Lotion®
- Aquanil Lotion®

2. Apply a bland moisturizer each time you wash your hands and as needed for dryness. You should have bottles of hand cream by every sink in the house, your car, your desk, your purse, etc.... You can't use these products too much! Examples of moisturizers include:

- Aquaphor Healing Ointment®
- Petrolatum (ointment)
- Eucerin Original Formula Creme®
- Cetaphil Cream®
- Neutrogena Norwegian Formula Hand Cream®

Avoid moisturizers with fragrance, as they are often irritating.

3. Protect your hands from direct contact with soaps, detergents, wet diapers, certain foods such as citrus products and other irritating chemicals by wearing waterproof, heavy-duty vinyl gloves (available from Allerderm: 1-800-365-6868). Heavy-duty vinyl gloves are better than rubber gloves, since you may become allergic to rubber. They should be conveniently kept in kitchen, bathroom, and laundry areas. If a glove develops a hole, discard it immediately. Wearing a glove with a hole is worse than wearing no gloves at all. Heat and



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How to protect your hands (continued):

sweat inside your gloves may be as bad for the hands as the irritation of soap and water. Do not put your hands into very hot water even when wearing the vinyl gloves.

4. We also strongly suggest that you wear cotton liner gloves as they will absorb any sweat and keep your hands drier. Cotton gloves are available from Allerderm (1-800-365-6868) or are often available at your Kaiser pharmacy.
5. Wear leather or heavy-duty fabric gloves when doing dry work and gardening. When they get dirty, put them in the washing machine. Wash your gloves--not your hands.
6. If you have an automatic dishwasher, use it as much as possible, otherwise let a member of your family do the dishes. Do your laundry by machine, not by hand.
7. Avoid direct contact with turpentine, paint thinner, paints, and floor, furniture, metal, and shoe polishes. They contain irritating solvents. When using them, wear heavy-duty waterproof gloves.
8. Rings often worsen dermatitis by trapping irritating materials beneath them. Remove your rings when doing housework and before washing your hands.
9. When outdoors in cold or windy weather, wear unlined leather gloves to protect your hands from drying and chapping.
10. Your physician may have prescribed a prescription cream and/or ointments for your hands. The prescription medicines should be applied 2-3 times a day. Use moisturizers in between medicine applications to keep your hands protected.

The prescription medicines are topical steroids. These can thin normal skin when used for extended periods of time. Use them two to three times a day faithfully to the affected skin until your skin is clear. Once your skin is clear (it may take 2-3 months), stop using the prescription creams and continue the good skin care discussed on this sheet.

11. Remember hand dermatitis is often a long-term problem that may flare up with exposure to irritants and with emotional stress. There is no fast, "magic" treatment for hand dermatitis. Your skin must be given a rest from irritation. Follow the above instructions carefully.