

# Hand Dermatitis

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Hand dermatitis (hand eczema) is common. Hand dermatitis usually results from a combination of sensitive skin and 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.

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 are irritating. When washing your hands use lukewarm water and no soap. If you need soap use a small amount of mild soap, such as Cetaphil cleansing lotion, Dove unscented soap.
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: Cetaphil cream, Cetaphil hand cream, Eucerin calming cream, Petrolatum.
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.

4. Heat and 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. We also 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.

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 for your hands. The prescription medicines should be applied 2 times a day. Use moisturizers in between medicine applications to keep your hand protected. The prescription medicines are topical steroids. These can thin normal skin when used for extended periods of time. Use them two times a day faithfully to the affected skin until your skin is clear. Once your skin is clear (it may take 1-2 months), stop using the prescription creams and continue the good skin care.

11. Remember hand dermatitis is often a long-term problem that may flare up with exposure to irritant 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.