

## Contact Dermatitis

### What is Contact Dermatitis?

Contact dermatitis occurs as a result of direct contact with an allergen which leads to the development of an itchy, red rash. This rash is not life-threatening or contagious, however it can be extremely uncomfortable. Many substances can be to blame for contact dermatitis, including jewelry, cosmetics, fragrances, latex gloves, and soaps. Substances can cause both irritant and allergic contact dermatitis. Irritant contact dermatitis is the most common form of contact dermatitis. It is a non-allergic reaction which occurs as a result of direct contact with a substance that damages your skin's protective layer. This can occur both after the initial encounter with the substance or after repeated exposures. Tolerance can be achieved over time. Allergic contact dermatitis occurs when an allergen causes an immune reaction in the skin. Common allergens include nickel, plants (such as poison ivy), and your own personal care products.

### What are Symptoms of Contact Dermatitis?

Contact dermatitis is limited to the portion of the body which had direct contact with the allergen. The rash usually develops within minutes to hours following exposure and can last about two to four weeks. Symptoms can include an itching, red rash, dry, cracked, scaly skin, bumps and blisters, which can sometimes ooze and crust, and swelling, burning, or tenderness.

### How is Contact Dermatitis Diagnosed?

Contact dermatitis can be diagnosed through a careful and detailed clinical history of the patient's habits and regular exposures. Patch testing to common contact allergens and your own skin care products can be performed. Patch testing works by exposing the skin to a small amount of the allergen for 48 hours before the patch can be removed and read by your allergist. If a skin reaction occurs in response to an allergen, it was most likely the cause of your rash.

### Prevention/Treatment

In order to successfully treat and manage contact dermatitis, the irritant or allergen must be identified and avoided. If you accidentally come into contact with the substance, you should immediately wash your skin with non-scented soap and warm water. Clothing which came into contact should also be washed. In general, all of your products should be non-scented. Protective clothing or gloves can be worn when contact with the substance is anticipated and regularly applying moisturizer can help to restore your skin's outermost layer. You should avoid scratching your skin as it can make the irritation worse and can lead to a skin infection. Antihistamines can be taken in order to reduce symptoms of itchiness.