

OHSU Dermatology

Contact Dermatitis

What is Contact Dermatitis?

Contact dermatitis is a skin condition that occurs when your skin comes into contact with a substance that irritates or triggers an allergic reaction in your skin. It can cause a range of symptoms, including:

- Redness
- Swelling
- Itching
- Burning
- Blistering
- Dryness
- Cracking
- Scaling

There are two main types of contact dermatitis:

1. **Irritant contact dermatitis:** This type of contact dermatitis occurs when your skin is exposed to an irritant, such as a chemical, that damages your skin's protective outer layer. This can happen with frequent exposure to detergents, solvents, or other chemicals. Irritant contact dermatitis can occur in anyone, regardless of whether they have a history of allergies.
2. **Allergic contact dermatitis:** This type of contact dermatitis occurs when your skin comes into contact with a substance that triggers an allergic reaction in your skin to a particular substance.

What are Common Contact Allergens?

1. **Nickel:** Found in jewelry, zippers, and other metal items.
2. **Fragrances:** Found in perfumes, colognes, lotions, and other personal care products.
3. **Latex:** Found in gloves, condoms, and other rubber products.
4. **Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac:** Found in plants that contain an oil called urushiol.
5. **Formaldehyde:** Found in some fabrics, adhesives, and other household products.
6. **Preservatives:** Found in some cosmetics, personal care products, and medications.
7. **Hair dyes:** Some people may be allergic to the chemicals found in hair dyes.
8. **Topical antibiotics:** Frequently neomycin and bacitracin are the culprit medications
9. **Sunscreen:** Some people may be allergic to various chemicals found in sunscreen.

We recommend using "Fragrance- Free" products for those who may be experiencing contact dermatitis.

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If you suspect that you have a contact allergy, it's important to see a healthcare provider for diagnosis and treatment. They may recommend an over-the-counter cream or ointment to relieve symptoms, or

they may prescribe a medication such as a corticosteroid. In some cases, they may recommend avoiding the allergen altogether.

OHSU Dermatology offers patch testing as a method to find the allergens causing contact dermatitis on individuals. Please see more about this process here:

<https://www.ohsu.edu/dermatology/contact-dermatitis-and-occupational-skin-disease-clinic>

Following patch testing, the American Contact Dermatitis Society – CAMP site offers patients a database to learn about their allergens, and find safe products to use.

<https://www.contactderm.org/resources/acds-camp>

Sources

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