

Living Better with Allergies

The itch that keeps on itching- All about Contact Dermatitis

From nickel, to other metals, to baby wipes, sunscreen, cosmetics and hair products, allergic contact dermatitis can occur in patients that have susceptible skin, due to a break in the skin barrier, sensitive skin or eczema. Eventually, a hapten, a small molecular particle, usually a product ingredient, is capable of inducing an immune response causing an allergic response, known as contact dermatitis. Contact dermatitis, differs from regular allergies such as hay fever, eczema, hives, or food allergies, as the symptoms are severe itching, redness, flaking and in severe cases, even swelling or blisters, within hours to days after exposure to that product, and the symptoms can persist for weeks up to months even after not touching the product again. The reason for the duration of the reaction is that contact dermatitis is a delayed allergy and it take a long time for the body to heal from the exposure. Another challenging part of dealing with contact dermatitis- it is often difficult to find the offending agent contributing to the contact dermatitis, which means the allergic person is most likely still being exposed to that ingredient unintentionally because it's found in various products. Fortunately, patch testing can help pinpoint the culprit allergen (ingredient) that is causing the contact allergy. In conclusion, we all have the potential to develop a reaction to any particular ingredient, and this can happen at any age, from babies to elderly adults. It has to do with a cumulative effect of exposure. Interestingly, the longer you use a product the higher the chance, your immune system has to recognize it, therefore, when visiting your board-certified allergist, it will be important to mention all the products that you use on a regular basis, new and old. The importance of patch testing, is that it will help identify the ingredient causing the allergy, which allows patients to appropriately avoid products that have that ingredient in it, and it also prevents them from unnecessarily avoiding other products. Unfortunately, this is a life-long allergy, meaning if you have had a reaction, you are going to have a reaction in the future if exposed to that ingredient. Therefore, strict avoidance is recommended. Other recommendations will be to read back labels for items that you are concerned about. Protect your skin from that ingredient if you must be exposed to it and see your board-certified allergist and immunologist for further evaluation. We can help! For more tips and tricks about contact dermatitis, please contact us at Asthma and Allergy Clinic at asthmaandallergyva.com, follow us on facebook at [facebook.com/AsthmaAllergyDocs](https://www.facebook.com/AsthmaAllergyDocs) or call us to schedule an appointment at The Asthma and Allergy Clinic of Dr. Sweeney and Palacios-Kibler 757.483.4150 or 757.539.7771