

Eczema & Atopic Dermatitis



SYMPTOMS

Eczema (dermatitis) is a chronic (long-term) condition that causes itchy and inflamed skin. Eczema rashes can change in appearance over time; when irritated, skin can be intensely itchy, red, weeping and crusted. Prolonged scratching and rubbing can cause the skin to become thickened or leathery.



CAUSE

Eczema is the result of personal and environmental factors — a combination of:

- genetic skin sensitivity and irritants
- allergens
- other stresses.

Our skin normally acts as a barrier that helps keep moisture in and germs out; in cases of atopic eczema, the skin is unable to perform this function properly, leaving the skin less protected. Dryness causes itchiness and scratching breaks down the barrier even further, leading to a vicious cycle. Eczema is **not contagious** and **can occur at any age**.



TREATMENT & MANAGEMENT

Due to its genetic nature, there is no cure for eczema, although a variety of treatments can help reduce itch, rash and redness. People living with eczema should avoid soap or other irritants (e.g. detergents, prickly or woollen clothing, long hot showers). Regular and frequent moisturising is highly recommended.



IMPORTANT TO NOTE

- The skin barrier weakness that causes atopic eczema may put patients at a higher risk of skin infections, and people with eczema may be more likely to have other atopic conditions such as asthma or hayfever.
- Patients with severe eczema may need a referral to a dermatologist.

About the Skin Health Institute

Founded in 1987, the Melbourne-based Skin Health Institute is recognised as a centre of excellence in skin health and a home for dermatology. We provide innovative treatment and patient care; education of registrars, specialists and GPs; and research and trials that make treatment and practice better. We aim to improve skin health and awareness for all Australians by equipping the public with vital information on skin cancer prevention and skin health across a lifetime.

SUPPORT OUR VITAL WORK

The Institute is a unique registered charity, providing patient-centred treatment, outstanding medical education and ground-breaking research on skin disease, chronic skin conditions and skin cancer. The research we conduct helps shape clinical treatment and practice around the world. But we can only continue our work with your support. If you're in a position to help us continue our important work, visit our website: skinhealthinstitute.org.au/donations

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I think the people make the Skin Health Institute what it is. Patients are always put first, and they're cared for."

— Smriti Tandon, registrar



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Common skin conditions and what you can do about them

A Skin Health Institute publication
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Skin cancer & Melanoma



SYMPTOMS

Skin cancer (including melanoma) can occur anywhere on the body, though areas exposed to the sun are most at risk – the head, neck, upper torso, arms and legs. Look out for new or unusual lumps, moles that have changed colour or shape, or thick, scaly patches. These may be marks that have not healed properly or that bleed intermittently. These spots may be itchy or tender.



CAUSE

Australia has the highest reported rates of skin cancer in the world: 70% of Australians will have at least one skin cancer by the time they reach age 70. Ultraviolet radiation is the main driver of skin cancers and melanomas. Fairer skin types have increased risk. There can sometimes be a family history of melanoma.



TREATMENT & MANAGEMENT

Early detection is crucial and effective for both conditions. The majority of early-stage skin cancer and melanoma patients will undergo surgical excision, followed by regular check-ups. Those with advanced melanoma or skin cancer will require more complicated treatments.



IMPORTANT TO NOTE

- Know your skin and **check it regularly**. Watch out for new spots or spots that change. Do not wait until they become raised, sore or bleed – a changing mole is a suspicious mole and should be shown to your GP.
- Remember to slip on sun **protective clothing**, slop on **sunscreen**, slap on a **hat**, seek out **shade** and slip on **sunglasses**.

Acne



SYMPTOMS

Acne occurs when a hair follicle and its sebaceous gland become blocked and inflamed. This provides an ideal environment for bacteria to grow and causes the skin to become irritated, red and tender, and can lead to scarring of the skin. Blackheads, whiteheads, pimples and cysts develop on the face, neck, back, chest and shoulders because this is where oil glands are largest and most active.



CAUSE

People with acne often have larger sebaceous glands and produce more sebum (oil) than people with unaffected skin. Acne tends to appear during teenage years and can clear up by itself in the mid-20s. However, sometimes acne is a serious, ongoing problem that needs medical assistance for the physical and psychological issues the condition can cause.



TREATMENT & MANAGEMENT

Available treatments focus on reducing breakouts, thereby reducing inflammation and preventing scarring. There are some effective non-prescription treatments for mild to moderate acne or periodic breakouts – ask your GP or pharmacist for recommendations. In cases of more severe or painful acne, patients may need stronger prescription treatments or a referral to a dermatologist.



IMPORTANT TO NOTE

- Without treatment, acne can lead to permanent scarring, anxiety and depression.
- While most acne is responsive to treatment, visible improvement can take several weeks or months.

Psoriasis



SYMPTOMS

Psoriasis can cause skin to appear raised, red or pinkish, and covered with a silver-white scale, which is sometimes thick.

Commonly affected areas include skin on the elbows, knees, scalp, behind the ears, torso, the buttocks, the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. Affected areas may be itchy or mildly uncomfortable.



CAUSE

Psoriasis is a chronic (long-term) condition that can appear at any age. It is thought to be caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. The condition is not contagious.



TREATMENT & MANAGEMENT

While there is no cure, there are effective ways to manage the condition. **Triggers** that may make psoriasis worse include:

- stress
- damage to the skin
- some medications
- infections
- changes in hormones
- smoking

There are a range of lifestyle measures that can **improve** psoriasis:

- reducing weight
- maintaining a balanced diet
- exercising regularly
- quitting smoking
- cutting back on alcohol



IMPORTANT TO NOTE

- Psoriasis can have comorbidities (other health consequences) so it's important to talk to your doctor about unusual skin inflammations. In patients with moderate to severe psoriasis, there are also higher rates of anxiety and depression.
- Depending on severity, your doctor may recommend ongoing treatment or referral.