Itching

Itching is a symptom that can be caused by many things. These include skin problems (including infections) as well as some internal diseases.

If the itching is affecting just one area of the body, it is most likely due to a common skin problem, such as:

- Poison oak and poison ivy.
- Contact dermatitis (skin irritation from a plant, chemicals, fiberglass, detergents, new cosmetic, new jewelry, or other substance).
- Fungus (such as athlete's foot, jock itch, or ringworm).
- Head lice
- Dandruff
- Insect bite
- Infection (such as Shingles or other virus infections).

If the itching is all over (widespread), the possible causes are many. These include:

- Dry skin or eczema
- Heat rash
- Hives
- Liver disorders
- Kidney disorders

TREATMENT

Localized itching

- **Lubrication of the skin** - Use an ointment or cream such as Vaseline, Eucerin, Nutraderm, Lubriderm, Shepherd's cream, or other unperfumed moisturizers if the skin is dry. Apply frequently, especially after bathing. Sarna lotion can "cool" the skin and reduce itching.
- **Anti-itch medicines** - Benadryl, Zyrtec, and Claritin are over-the-counter medications that may help control the urge to scratch. Scratching always makes itching worse and increases the chance of getting an infection.
- **Cortisone creams and ointments** - These help reduce the inflammation.
- **Antibiotics** - Skin infections can cause itching. Topical or oral antibiotics may be needed for 10-20 days to get rid of an infection.

If you can identify what caused the itching, avoid this substance in the future.

Widespread itching

The following measures may help to relieve itching regardless of the cause:

- Wash the skin once with soap to remove irritants.
- Bathe in tepid water with baking soda, cornstarch, oatmeal or Aveeno.
- Use calamine lotion (nonprescription) or a baking soda solution (1 teaspoon in 4 ounces of water on the skin).
- Apply 1% hydrocortisone cream (no prescription needed). **DO NOT** use this if there might be a skin infection.
- Avoid scratching.
- Avoid itchy or tight-fitting clothes.
- Avoid excessive heat, sweating, scented soaps, and swimming pools.
- The lubricants, anti-itch medicines, etc. noted above may be helpful for controlling symptoms.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- The itching becomes severe.
- Your itch is not better after 1 week of treatment. Contact your caregiver to schedule further evaluation.

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