# Irritant Dermatitis

Skin inflammation due to exposure to a substance that causes a physical or chemical irritation of the skin is called irritant dermatitis or irritant contact dermatitis.

## CAUSES

Most commonly this dermatitis is due to repeated exposure to mildly irritating substances such as ingredients in:

- Make-up.
- Soaps.
- Detergents.
- Bleaches.
- Acids.
- Metal salts such as nickel.

## SYMPTOMS

Pain and burning are usually caused by the irritants, and less commonly mild to severe itching. Repeated exposure to the substance leads to skin that is thickened, cracked, and dry. **Treatment includes protecting the skin from further contact with the irritating substance through avoidance of that substance if possible.** Barrier creams, powders, and gloves may be helpful. Dry, cracked skin should be treated with ointments (*salves*) or creams.

More harsh chemicals can cause skin damage that is like a burn with only a brief period of contact, for example alkalis or acids. You should flush your skin for 15-20 minutes with cold water after such an exposure. **Chemical burns may not appear to be bad at first, but they can progress over several days to cause severe skin damage. Immediate medical care should be sought after exposure.** Special dressings, antibiotics, and pain medicine may be needed for severely irritated skin.

## TREATMENT

Hydrocortisone and prescription cortisone creams applied four times daily to the affected area will help speed healing; cortisone pills or injections may be needed in some cases. See your doctor for follow-up care to make sure your skin is healing properly.

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