

## Prevention

Preventing contact dermatitis means avoiding coming into contact with those substances such as poison ivy or harsh soaps that may cause it. Prevention strategies include:

- Rinse the skin with water and use a mild soap if you come in contact with a substance. Prompt washing can remove many of the irritants or allergens from your skin. Be sure to rinse the soap completely off your body.
- Wear cotton or plastic gloves when doing housework to avoid contact with cleaners or solutions.
- If on the job, wear protective clothing or gloves to shield your skin against harmful agents.
- Apply a barrier cream or gel to your skin to provide a protective layer. Also, use a moisturizer to restore the outermost layer of skin and to prevent the evaporation of moisture.
- Use a mild, unscented laundry detergent when washing clothes, towels and bedding. Try using the extra rinse cycle on your washing machine.

## Self-care

To help reduce itching and soothe inflamed skin, try these self-care measures:

- Try to identify and avoid substances that irritate your skin or that cause an allergic reaction. These can include nickel, jewelry, perfume, cleaning products and cosmetics.
- Apply an anti-itch cream or calamine lotion to the affected area. A nonprescription hydrocortisone cream, containing at least 1 percent hydrocortisone, can temporarily relieve the itch. A nonprescription oral antihistamine, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl, others), may be helpful if itching is severe.
- Avoid scratching whenever possible. Cover the itchy area if you can't keep from scratching it. Trim nails and wear gloves at night.
- Apply cool, wet compresses. Covering the affected area with bandages and dressings can help protect the skin and prevent scratching.
- Take a comfortably cool bath. Sprinkle the bath water with baking soda, uncooked oatmeal or colloidal oatmeal — a finely ground oatmeal that is made for the bathtub (Aveeno, others).
- Wear smooth-textured cotton clothing. This will help you avoid irritation.
- Choose mild soaps without dyes or perfumes. Be sure to rinse the soap completely off your body. And after washing, apply a moisturizer to protect your skin.