



SCABIES

DEFINITION

Scabies is fiercely itchy skin condition caused by a tiny mite commonly referred to as the “itch mite.” More than 300 million cases of scabies occur worldwide every year and can strike anyone of any race or age, regardless of personal hygiene.

The earliest and most common symptom of scabies is itching, especially at night. Little red bumps like hives, tiny bites, or pimples appear. In more advanced cases, the skin may be crusty or scaly. Scabies prefers warmer sites on the skin such as skin folds, where clothing is tight, between the fingers or under the nails, on the elbows or wrists, the buttocks or belt line, around the nipples, and on the penis. Mites also tend to hide in, or on, bracelets and watchbands, or the skin under rings. In children, the infestation may involve the entire body including the palms, soles, and scalp. The child may be tired and irritable because of loss of sleep from itching or scratching all night.

Because the infestation is contagious, anyone can catch it. Scabies is most common in those who have close physical contact with others, particularly children, mothers of young children, sexually active young adults, and elderly people in nursing homes. Fortunately, it is easy to treat and usually only causes temporary distress. Remember, although you may be disturbed at the thought of bugs, scabies is no reflection on your personal cleanliness.

TREATMENT FOR ADULTS

5% permethrin cream or 1% lindane lotion (as prescribed by your doctor) is applied to the skin from the neck down at bedtime and washed off the next morning. Medicine should be applied to cool, dry skin over the entire body (including the palms of the hands, under finger nails, soles of the feet, and the groin) and left on for 8 to 14 hours. A second treatment one week later may be recommended. To prevent reinfestation, all persons living in the same household must be treated at the same time (even those who are not itching). Sheets, towels, and clothing should be laundered on the day of treatment.

TREATMENT FOR CHILDREN UNDER 3 YEARS OF AGE

Lindane should not be used on infants, small children, pregnant or nursing women, or people with seizures or other neurological diseases. 10% percent sulfur ointment and crotamiton cream may be used for infants. Children less than 18 months must treat all areas including the scalp. Pregnant women should consult with their obstetrician before treatment.

POST-SCABETIC ITCH

Lesions usually heal within four to six weeks after treatment. It is important to note that itching always persists for several days to weeks after treatment and is not a sign of persistent infestation. Continued itching is to be expected. Do not reapply permethrin or lindane more than instructed by your physician as this could be dangerous. Steroid creams or antihistamine pills may be prescribed to help decrease itching.

