

## 1 Hand eczema

Even the smallest hand eczema should be treated efficiently during the early stages. This prevents the eczema from recurring and becoming chronic.

The most common reasons for hand eczema are irritation contact eczema, atopic tendency, and allergic contact eczema. However, examinations do not always show a clear reason for hand eczema. A stressful life situation may also maintain or worsen hand eczema.

Other illnesses may also cause eczema on the hands, such as psoriasis, infectious eczema, or pustulosis palmoplantaris (PPP)

If a patient with hand eczema has been diagnosed with allergic contact eczema to some substance, we aim to find out how the substance has ended up in contact with the skin. The aim is to entirely remove or replace the substances containing the allergen. If that is not possible, appropriate gloves must be used.

In dermatitis, the protective cornified layer of the skin is damaged and the skin is more sensitive to irritating factors. Even the smallest stimuli can prolong the eczema. This is why all patients with hand eczema should avoid contact with substances, which irritate the skin.

### 1.1 Factors irritating the skin of the hands include:

- All kinds of labour and mechanical strain from everyday life (e.g. carrying groceries, Hoovering, driving a car, cycling, gym exercise, mechanical labour with hands)
- Abundant washing of hands and getting the skin wet constantly
- Exposure to dish washing liquid, soap, shampoo, and other skin cleansing products
- Moisture and chafing in gloves

- Handling foods (vegetables, fruits, spices, fish, meat) with bare hands
- Solvents (nail polish remover, turpentine, gasoline, thinner)
- Motor oils, dirt, dust
- Too hot or too cold (frostbite) or quick changes in temperature.

It is important to reduce exposure to all irritating factors. If exposure cannot be completely avoided, skin protection must be improved with appropriate gloves.

## **1.2 Hand protection**

Tight gloves must be used when performing wet tasks. Single-use gloves (made of vinyl, polyethylene, nitrile rubber or natural latex, among others) are available in supermarkets, department stores, and pharmacies. We recommend non-powdered gloves, because the powder may dry and irritate the skin.

We also recommend using cotton gloves under the single-use gloves. Turn the cotton gloves inside out so the seams do not chafe the eczema area. Cotton gloves absorb sweat and prevent moisture and chafing caused by the protective gloves. Change the cotton gloves as soon as they get moist. It is best to buy several pairs of cotton gloves, and they can be washed in 60 degrees Celsius. Cotton pimple-grip gloves are good for preventing mechanical strain to the hands while e.g. driving a car or performing dry chores at home.

Hands must be protected also at home during all kitchen chores, such as when preparing meals and handling dirty dishes. Protective gloves can also be worn in the shower when applying shampoo and soap. You can wear rubber bands around your wrists to keep water from going into the gloves.

Gloves should also be worn when applying any hair products. Leather and pleather gloves are suitable for avoiding mechanical strain e.g. in outdoor chores. For gardening, it would be best to wear water-resistant fabric gloves in which the outer surface is covered with rubber up to the back of the hand.

Avoid using dirty gloves and check the condition of your gloves regularly. Using different assistive devices (e.g. cleaning implements and machines) reduces the stress caused to the skin of the hands.

Wearing gloves during cold weather also protects the skin.

### 1.3 Skin care instructions

Wash your hands as little as possible. Washing the hands with a light basic lotion instead of using soap is an important part of hand eczema treatment. Regardless of the difficulty of the eczema, lotion washing should become a part of your daily routine. Use lukewarm water to wash your hands. If needed, use mild, scent-free soap for hands to remove dirt. Hand soap must not contain exfoliating or chafing ingredients nor solvents. Dry your hands carefully, especially between the fingers. Avoid using rings and wristbands because dirt, soaps, and moisture collects under them. Long nails also easily collect dirt, so it is best to keep your nails short.

Any prescribed lotions must be used according to the doctor's orders. Hand eczema is treated with medical creams or lotions (e.g. cortisone lotion) and basic lotions. Medical lotion is usually applied once a day. A sufficient amount of medical lotion is spread on the hand eczema areas.



*Photo: Applying cortisone lotion.*

Basic lotion is also applied during cortisone treatment. It is of utmost importance to apply basic lotion regularly and daily to keep the skin moisture levels sufficient when treating hand eczema.

Apply basic lotion about an hour later so the medical lotion has enough time to absorb. Basic lotion use continues even when medical lotion is no longer used. It is important to apply basic lotion after showering when the skin is drying to maintain moisture and lipid levels on the skin.

Basic lotion prevents the skin from drying and prevents eczemas. To find the suitable lotion for you, start from medium weight lotions, and then switch to creamier or lighter lotions according to your needs and preferences. If a basic lotion stings your skin, it is best to try a creamier lotion.

You can put cotton gloves on after applying lotions. They protect the skin and keep the lotion from staining other items. You can of course be without the gloves at first so all the lotion will not be absorbed in the gloves.

In tasks requiring a high level of hygiene, you can also use hand disinfectants. Hand disinfectants are not necessary at home.

After the hand eczema has healed, the skin's protection mechanism is still weak for about six months. To prevent the eczema from recurring, it is important to follow the treatment instructions for a long time after the eczema has healed.