

THE ORIGIN OF NEURODERMATITIS, THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHODS OF TREATMENT

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Annotation: Neurodermatitis is a non-life-threatening skin condition involving itching and scratching, usually on just one or two patches of skin. It is also called lichen simplex chronicus.

Key words: neurodermatitis, blood, dermatology, legs, ankles, wrists, hands.

The itch can occur anywhere on the body but is most commonly found on the arms, shoulders, elbows, legs, ankles, wrists, hands, back of the neck or scalp. The anal and genital areas and the face might also itch. The itching can be intense, causing frequent scratching, or it might come and go. It is most active when the patient is relaxing or trying to sleep. In some cases, the patient wakes up scratching or rubbing the affected area.

The itchy patches measure between 3 centimeters by 6 centimeters and 6 centimeters by 10 centimeters. The patches can look:

- Dry.
- Thick.
- Scaly.
- Leathery.
- Differently colored, such as reddish, brownish, yellowish, gray or purple. Older patches can appear white or pale in the center, surrounded by darker colors. Over time, there might be scarring.

Scratching can irritate nerve endings in the skin and worsen the itching, leading to more scratching. The condition can become chronic as the itch-scratch cycle continues.

It is estimated that neurodermatitis occurs in about 12% of the population. Research has shown that people between 30 years old and 50 years old are more likely to contract the condition. Women are more likely than men to suffer from neurodermatitis at a ratio of 2:1. Those with anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders and family members with histories of other skin diseases, including eczema and contact dermatitis, are more likely to develop neurodermatitis.

Some recent studies have suggested that those with certain personality traits – including poor social skills, lack of flexibility, tendency toward pain avoidance, dependency on other people, people-pleasing and dutifulness – are more likely to have neurodermatitis. However, other studies have found no connection between personality and the condition.

An anxiety disorder is a type of mental health condition.¹ If you have an anxiety disorder, you may respond to certain things and situations with fear and dread. You may also experience physical signs of anxiety, such as a pounding heart and sweating.

It's normal to have some anxiety. You may feel anxious or nervous if you have to tackle a problem at work, go to an interview, take a test or make an important decision. And anxiety can even be beneficial. For example, anxiety helps us notice dangerous situations and focuses our attention, so we stay safe.

But an anxiety disorder goes beyond the regular nervousness and slight fear you may feel from time to time. An anxiety disorder happens when:

Anxiety interferes with your ability to function.

You often overreact when something triggers your emotions.

You can't control your responses to situations.

Anxiety disorders can make it difficult to get through the day. Fortunately, there are several effective treatments for anxiety disorders.

The underlying cause of neurodermatitis is unknown. However, it has been observed that the itch can start during times of extreme stress, anxiety, emotional trauma or depression. The itching sometimes continues even after the mental stress eases or stops.

Other possible neurodermatitis triggers include:

Nerve injuries.

Insect bites.

Dry skin.

Wearing tight clothing, especially if the material is a synthetic fiber, like polyester or rayon. These factors can cause sensitive skin to overreact and itch.

Other skin diseases. Neurodermatitis sometimes happens as a result of eczema and psoriasis.

Psoriasis is an autoimmune condition that causes inflammation in your skin. Symptoms of psoriasis include thick areas of discolored skin covered with scales. These thick, scaly areas are called plaques.

Psoriasis is a chronic skin condition, which means it can flare up unexpectedly and there's no cure.

Neurodermatitis rarely heals without treatment. A dermatologist will write a treatment plan that is unique for each patient. The main goal is to stop the itching and scratching. Treatments can include medications like:

Corticosteroids. These medicines can be applied to the itchy patch or injected into the patch. Corticosteroids help reduce redness, swelling, heat, itching and tenderness, and can soften thickened skin.

Corticosteroids are man-made drugs that closely resemble cortisol, a hormone that your adrenal glands produce naturally. Corticosteroids are often referred to by the shortened term "steroids." Corticosteroids are different from the male hormone-related steroid compounds that some athletes abuse.

Antihistamines. Taken before bedtime, an antihistamine can cut back on itching during sleep. It can also help prevent allergic reactions that would worsen the condition.

¹ American Psychiatric Association. What Are Anxiety Disorders? (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/anxiety-disorders/what-are-anxiety-disorders>) Accessed 12/1/2020.

Antihistamines are a class of drugs commonly used to treat symptoms of allergies. These drugs help treat conditions caused by too much histamine, a chemical created by your body's immune system. Antihistamines are most commonly used by people who have allergic reactions to pollen and other allergens. They are also used to treat a variety of other conditions such as stomach problems, colds, anxiety and more.

Antibiotics. These are prescribed if the patchy area is infected. Antibiotics can be applied to the skin or taken orally in pill form.

Moisturizers. These reduce dryness and itching.

Coal tar preparations. This type of medicine causes the skin to shed dead cells and slows the growth of new cells. Patients can place it directly on their skin or add it to their bath.

Capsaicin creams. These can relieve both pain and itching.

Your doctor might also suggest:

Coverings. Using bandages, socks or gloves can prevent night scratching, allowing better sleep. Covering also helps medicine applied to the skin penetrate better. (This is also called occlusion.)

Cool compresses. These can be placed on the skin about five minutes before applying corticosteroids. The compress softens the skin so the medicine can penetrate easier, and it can also relieve itching.

Antidepressants and/or therapy. This type of treatment may be suggested if it is believed that anxiety, depression or stress is causing the itch.

Antidepressants are prescription medications that help treat depression. Healthcare providers prescribe them to treat other conditions as well.

Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and a loss of interest in things and activities you once enjoyed. It can also cause difficulty with thinking, memory, motivation, eating and sleeping.

There are several types of depressive disorders, some of which include:

Clinical depression (major depressive disorder).

Bipolar depression.

Persistent depressive disorder (PDD).

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD).

Atypical depression.

Seasonal depression (seasonal affective disorder).

Antidepressants are one type of treatment for depression. While they can treat the symptoms of depression, they don't always address its causes. This is why healthcare providers often recommend psychotherapy (talk therapy) in addition to depression medication.

Antidepressants were invented in the 1950s. Since then, researchers have developed several different types of the medication. Today, antidepressants are one of the most frequently prescribed medications in the United States.

If none of these treatments are effective, nontraditional treatments include:

A solution that mixes aspirin and dichloromethane applied to the itchy area.

Treatments usually used for atopic dermatitis/eczema (tacrolimus and/or pimecrolimus).

An injection of botulinum toxin (Botox®), a toxic protein that can cause flaccid paralysis, or muscle weakness in the body. In a study of three neurodermatitis patients, all three itched less after one week of treatment and within four weeks the itchy patches were gone.

Phototherapy, or light therapy. This approach should not be used on genitals.

Traditional surgery to remove the itchy patch or cryosurgery to destroy unwanted tissue using intense cold

With the right treatment plan, neurodermatitis can heal completely. However, the doctor and patient may have to adjust the plan or try different plans. Sticking with the plan is vital, especially if neurodermatitis is on the genitals, where cases of the condition are most stubborn.

Unfortunately, neurodermatitis can return if activated by one of the triggers. Then, the patient must return for treatment. In some cases, a doctor will continue treatment on a patient who has healed to prevent the condition from returning.

Sometimes, neurodermatitis can develop into skin cancers like squamous-cell or verrucous carcinoma. This is perhaps due to continuous scratching and rubbing, which can activate chemicals that cause inflammation, which in turn can transform skin cells to cancerous cells.

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