

Ask Dr. Mikell

By Dr. Oswald Mikell

Dr. Oswald Mikell, MD • Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry

American Board of Dermatology | American Board of Cosmetic Surgery | Physician of the Year 2008

Skin Allergies

Itchy skin allergies can affect up to 20 percent of the population at some point in their lives. They may have any number of causes including food, medications, insect bites and stings, sun light, heat, topical applications (creams, sprays, cosmetics), plants (Poison Ivy) and even stress. From hives to swelling, and eczema to drug and medication rashes, skin allergies can have a huge impact on your quality of life - disrupting daily activities and even sleep.

Q: Occasionally I break out in hives. What is the recommended treatment?

A: Hives (medically known as *urticaria*) are red, itchy, raised areas of skin that appear in varying shapes and sizes. An outbreak that may feel alarming to you first thing in the morning can be completely gone by noon, only to be back in full force later in the day. Very few, if any other skin diseases occur and then resolve so rapidly. The main course of treatment is antihistamines. These are usually given in oral forms, and may need to be given in large or frequent doses to control the symptoms. Short courses of corticosteroids may be needed.

Q: Is there such a thing as an allergy to sun exposure? I have experienced this and it's different than a sunburn.

A: If you experience itching, redness and hives on areas of skin exposed to sunlight, it may be solar urticaria, a chronic form of hives that is caused by exposure to sunlight. Sometimes symptoms can be confused with a sunburn, although solar urticaria can occur within minutes of exposure to the sun, and goes away much quicker (less than a day) after sun exposure has stopped. Treatment can include antihistamines, as well as the application of topical steroid creams such as hydrocortisone. Occasionally, oral steroids, such as prednisone, are required to treat severe symptoms.

Q: My child is allergic to sun screen – what can I do to provide protection?

A: There are many varieties of sun block available and many people find they are sensitive or allergic to one or more of the components. Unfortunately, it may be a matter of trial and error to find the sunscreen/sun block that does not cause irritation. Typically, sun blocks that contain titanium dioxide or zinc oxide as an active ingredient have the least likelihood of sensitivity.

Q: What is the treatment for eye lid rash?

A: Eyelid rashes are a common problem, especially for women, and can be caused by a variety of allergic reactions and autoimmune diseases. The skin over the eyelids is very thin, and is especially susceptible to rashes caused by allergies, especially to cosmetics and hair care products. DO NOT try to treat eyelid rash at home. You should never take any chances with your eyes. See a Dermatologist.

Q: What is Dermatographism?

A: Dermatographism means the ability to write on the skin. With this condition, the skin is sensitive to touch and pressure, as well as scratching. The areas of skin that are touched or scratched get a raised, red and itchy rash. If dermatographism is not particularly bothersome, then no treatment is needed. Symptoms can be decreased with the use of various antihistamines – those containing hydroxyzine seem to work especially well.

Many skin allergies can be treated with over-the-counter antihistamines and cortisone, however, if you have a reaction that is severe or persists, call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 on Hilton Head Island or 843-705-0840 in Bluffton / Okatie. Our experienced staff will be able to provide proper treatment.