

Arachnitis (Scabies)

Information about scabies, its treatment and prevention.

What Is Arachnitis/Scabies?

Scabies is caused by generally small numbers of tiny mites (0.3mm) which after a few hours burrow just under the skin surface and cause a marked allergic reaction or dermatitis anywhere on the body. We generally only have a small number of mites but these can make us itchy all over making us believe we have a large number. They often cause an itch in a different part of the body to where they actually are, so when we treat we must be very thorough to cover all over ourselves from the jawline down

Why Is It So Important To Treat Scabies?

Scabies will not go away without treatment

Who Gets It?

- Anyone! **Even the cleanest people get scabies**
- Washing in soap and water or swimming in the sea will not cure it

How Do You Catch It?

- Scabies usually spreads by direct skin contact with other people who have it in the family, boyfriends and girlfriends, and with children's friends, etc
- By close body contact e.g. holding hands, hugging, sleeping together. The longer the direct skin contact the more likely the chances of catching it, regardless of cleanliness
- By sharing clothes and bedding within usually 4 days of 'contamination'
- Scabies do not live and multiply in furniture, carpets or on cats and dogs
- Generally we do not develop the delayed allergic reaction (c.f. hay fever) to the mite until it has been on us for about at least 10 days but up to several weeks, unless we have had it before. Scabies does not bite, its existence on us causes the allergic reaction
- Although we nearly always only catch it by direct skin contact with other people, as the mite is usually only present in low numbers and is just under the skin surface most of the time, it is relatively hard to catch or pass on. The more sociable we are the more likely we are to be unlucky and pick it up

How Do You Know You Have It?

- Scabies usually causes a **very itchy rash** which is worse at bedtime when your skin is warm
- The rash is caused by an allergic hypersensitivity reaction to the scabies mite
- You may notice the rash first, often between fingers, on the wrist, outside elbows, around the waist, feet or on the bottom and on the genitals
- If someone in the family has scabies, others may have caught it also without noticing a rash or itch
- Some people, especially but not only the debilitated, have minimal or no rash

How To Treat Scabies

Everyone living in the house, Rest Home (rooms or wings as appropriate) should be treated at the same time even if they are not itchy

It is often easiest to treat before going to bed

- Children under 2 years and pregnant women should see their doctor first for advice about treatment as the treatment might be different
 - You will need a special cream or lotion to treat
 - Your doctor will give you a prescription. Tell the doctor how many people you have ongoing skin contact with and need cream/lotion for
1. **Cover the whole body with cream/lotion, from the jawline down including in between the fingers, under the nails, on the private parts, buttock cleft, between the toes and on the soles of the feet.** i.e. 'Everywhere that is dry' below the jawline!
 2. The cream/lotion must be left on at least overnight (e.g. 8 hours)
 3. If you wash your hands within this time (e.g. post toilet in the night) it is important to put the cream/lotion back on your hands again
 4. Next morning have a bath or shower and wear clean clothes
 5. This treatment process is generally repeated in one week's time

To stop scabies from spreading:

- All clothes, sheets and towels worn against the skin in the last **4 days** must be washed in hot water. **The mite can usually only survive off people for a maximum of 4 days**
- If clothes cannot be washed, dryclean them or put them in a sealed plastic bag **for 4 days** to kill any scabies. **Slippers/footwear with direct skin contact may be placed in a plastic bag, sprayed with fly spray, close/seal bag for 2 hours to kill any mites**
- Sheets, pillowcases, towels and face-cloths should be washed, ideally in hot water. It is **not** necessary to wash blankets, duvets or quilts if sheets are between. The mite is not small enough to go through the weave of a sheet
- The itchiness will not go away as soon as the treatment is finished. Mites cause an allergy even when they are killed by the cream but remain under the skin surface. The dead, newly treated mites just under the surface of the skin will be evicted by the skin over several days to weeks, like a thorn or thistle
- So, it might take up to 4 weeks for the allergic reaction or itch to go away completely after successful treatment
- During this time you can use anti itch creams
- If you still have the rash and itch after 4 weeks, see your doctor

- Remember** - This mite has nothing to do with cleanliness, just direct skin contact
- **Successful treatments relate to thoroughness of cream/lotion application**
 - Reapply cream to hands after washing post toilet (e.g. at night)
 - Never put cream only on the itchy parts of your skin, the mite can be anywhere on you even those areas not itching
 - Only reapply the cream/lotion as directed by your doctor, you can develop an allergy (itch) to the cream if used too often