



How to Manage Itchy Skin (Pruritus)

This guide will help you understand:

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This guide is written for people living with kidney disease and those who help care for them. It does not replace advice from your healthcare team (for example, your nephrologist, nurses, social worker, dietitian, pharmacist, and family doctor).

What is Itchy Skin?

Itchiness is an uncomfortable feeling that makes you want to scratch. You may be itchy over certain areas of your skin (for example, arm, leg, back, or chest) or all over your body.

- Itchiness may last a long time, be intense, and become worse at night
- Your skin may look normal or it may look red, dry, cracked, bumpy, or spots or blisters may appear
- Scratching makes the itching worse and can cause breaks in the skin, bleeding, and infection
- Itchy skin is also known as pruritus (proo-RIE-tus)



Tell your healthcare team if you have itchy skin, especially if it affects your everyday activities or your sleep.

What Causes Itchy Skin?

Itchy skin is common for people living with kidney disease. It will affect some people more than others.

Itchy skin may be caused by:

- Kidney disease
- Dry skin
- Skin sensitivities and allergies

- If you are getting dialysis, itchy skin may be caused by not getting enough dialysis
- If you itch only during dialysis treatments, you may be having a reaction to something used during your treatments

What Can I Do To Help Manage Itchy Skin?

There are many things you can try to help manage itchy skin. Try to figure out if there is a cause for the itching. Is it better at some times than others? What helps or makes it worse? Tell your healthcare team what changes you feel and see with your skin.

Consider making changes to your:

Home Environment

- Keep your home cool and humid, especially in the winter
- When doing laundry, use mild detergents and make sure clothes and bedding are rinsed well
- Wear loose, lightweight cotton clothes and use cotton bed sheets
- Avoid wearing rough clothes, such as wool and polyester, over itchy areas



Self-Care Strategies

- Bathe or shower for less than 15 minutes everyday in lukewarm (not hot) water. Take baths instead of showers if you are able.
- Soaps and body washes can irritate your skin (especially those with perfumes)
 - Use gentle soaps or cleansers (for example, Dove Sensitive Skin Beauty Bar, CeraVe, or Cetaphil)
 - Wash only the parts of your body that really need cleaning (for example, sweaty areas like your armpits and groin)
 - Use water to wash the rest of your body
- Gently pat your skin dry instead of rubbing your skin



- Moisturize your skin within 2 minutes of getting out of the bath/shower – your skin should still be damp
- Use an unscented hypoallergenic moisturizer cream (not lotions)
- Some creams to consider are: CeraVe, Cetaphil moisturizing cream, Lipikar Baume AP+ cream, Aveeno cream, Glaxal base cream, Cliniderm soothing cream, Aquaphor ointment, Vaseline ointment, Vaseline Intensive Care Problem Skin Therapy, or Uremol cream



- Keep your fingernails short and clean. Try not to scratch or rub the itchy areas (it only makes it worse and can lead to infection).
- Use a cold compress on the itchy areas
- Do not take over-the-counter anti-histamines (for example, Benadryl) without consulting your healthcare team

Dialysis Care

- If you are getting dialysis, talk to your healthcare team about your itchy skin. You might need a different amount of dialysis or changes to your medications or diet.

When Should I Talk To My Healthcare Team?

Speak to your healthcare team if itchy skin is a problem for you. Your healthcare team may have suggestions for treatment options, such as medicated creams, medicine and phototherapy.

Write down your symptoms and tell your doctor about them:

- What does it feel like?
- When does it happen?
- What makes it better or worse?
- What have you already tried?



Your healthcare team wants to know about your itchy skin. Your concerns and questions are important. Do not be afraid to share them.



Notes

The Ontario Renal Network gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

This document is designed to provide people living with kidney disease with information about anxiety. It is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a qualified health professional, nor is it intended to provide a comprehensive list of treatment options. As treatment options and standards are constantly evolving, we do not guarantee that the information in this document is current. Always ask your healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.

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1-855-460-2647, TTY 416-217-1815, publicaffairs@cancercare.on.ca Jun. 2019 ORN4060