

Any further questions?

If you have any more questions or problems please phone the dermatology department on 020 7272 3070 between Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

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Use it until the bubbles, or weeping areas clear up. Put some warm water in a washing bowl and add potassium permanganate crystals (which are purple) so you have a pale purple coloured liquid.

Soak your hands in the liquid for 20 minutes twice a day. Pat your hands dry, then put on your moisturiser and steroid cream.

Please note, the solution does discolour the fingernails, to prevent this cover your fingernails with Vaseline or nail polish.

Infection

Occasionally, your hand eczema can become infected. The skin becomes very painful to touch and is covered in a thick golden crust or pus.

You should contact your GP who may give you antibiotics medicine. You should continue to soak your hands in potassium permanganate solution and use the steroid cream.

You can look after your hands by

- protecting them
- avoiding soap
- using plenty of moisturiser
- putting on steroid creams sensibly

Hand eczema

A patient's guide

.... caring for you 

What is hand eczema?

Hand eczema (or hand dermatitis) is a skin condition where the skin on the hands may become very red, sore and cracked. Sometimes it is also very itchy.

Often, little water filled bubbles can form on the sides of the fingers and palms of the hands. These can be extremely itchy. Sometimes the bubbles burst and the skin becomes weepy and sticky.

Hand eczema is not infectious and cannot be passed to others. Hand eczema is extremely common, usually affecting adults. It cannot be cured but it can be treated.

What are the causes of hand eczema?

There are three basic causes of eczema

You inherit a tendency to eczema. This can be hand eczema or general eczema all over our body including your hands. Some people who have had hand eczema also suffer from asthma and hay fever.

You can develop hand eczema because your hands have repeatedly been put in water or been irritated by chemicals.

Less often, you can develop hand eczema because you are allergic to a specific material that you have touched, such as rubber, glue and plants.

If it seems like a skin allergy the doctor will arrange for you to have a patch test to find the cause of the allergy.

What is the treatment?

Try to avoid all things that irritate the skin of your hands. It does not matter what the causes of your eczema is, it will get worse if the skin on your hand gets irritated regularly.

Protect your hands from water, soaps, detergents and dirt (if you have a job where your hands get dirty) you will need cotton lined, PVC gloves that you can buy from large supermarkets or chemists. Make sure you have some spares in case they get wet inside.

If you need to clean your hands, it is best to use aqueous cream instead of soap. This can be bought over the counter in chemists. Apply the aqueous cream and then wash it off with water. It will clean the skin like a soap without drying or irritating it.

Moisturising the skin

The skin on your hands is like fine leather. If leather gets wet, it then dries out becoming cracked and hard. A similar thing happens to the skin on your hands unless you moisturise it with moisturising creams.

You need to use creams lots of times during the day, up to 16 times a day, to stop the skin drying out. If you do this you will find your skin is more supple and less likely to crack or flake. The more moisturiser you use the less topical steroid you will need to use.

Topical steroid-type creams

Your doctor can prescribe these creams. Topical steroid creams are put onto the skin, to damp down the inflammation on your hands.

If you use these creams over a long period of time the skin can become thin. So it is important that you use these creams on the sore and itchy areas of your hands only, not as a moisturising cream all over your hands.

If you use steroid creams sensibly, together with moisturisers they can control hand eczema.

Potassium permanganate

You can buy this from your chemist over the counter. Potassium permanganate dissolved in water, is very useful when you get itchy water filled blisters or bubbles on your hands. It is also useful when the eczema gets weepy and sticky. It dries out the blisters and reduces the itching.