Scabies

Patient information leaflet

Common Ailments Service

Only use this leaflet if your pharmacist has advised you about your or your child's condition.

Scabies is a common skin condition caused by tiny mites. The mites burrow into the skin to lay eggs. They leave small tunnels under the skin that may look like thin silver lines. These lines are often easiest to see between the fingers.

Scabies causes intense itching. The itching is often worse at night and can make it difficult to sleep. A lumpy, red rash may appear soon after the itching starts. The rash may be hard to see on brown and black skin.

The rash can cover most of the body. In young children and elderly people, it may spread to the head and neck. Scratching can cause small spots filled with pus to develop. Scabies can make skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis worse.

Scabies is not usually serious, but spreads easily through skin-to-skin contact. After skin contact with a person who has scabies, it can take up to 6 weeks for itching to start and the rash to appear. If you have had scabies before, the symptoms may appear after only 1 to 3 days.

Scabies is not caused by poor hygiene.

Treatment and Prevention

If you have scabies, you and anyone you have had close physical contact with should be treated, even if they do not have symptoms.

Any sexual partners you have had within the past month should have treatment.

It is important to treat all members of your household within a 24-hour period. See your doctor if you have a child under 2 years old.

Medicines that can help

These medicines are not suitable for everyone. Make sure you have asked your pharmacist for advice about what treatment is best for you or your child.

Scabies will not go away by itself. It can be treated with a cream or liquid that you spread over your whole body.

Permethrin cream is usually tried first. If this is not suitable for you, or if you have tried it and it has not worked, your pharmacist may recommend that you try **malathion liquid**.

Treatment and Prevention

Using permethrin cream or malathion liquid

1. Apply the treatment at night if possible.
2. Remove all your clothes and any jewellery that can be removed.
3. Wash with cool (not hot) water, taking care with skin creases and the areas under your nails.
4. Make sure your skin is clean, cool and dry before applying the treatment.
5. Apply the cream or liquid to your whole body. The product information may tell you not to treat the scalp and face, but it is usually best to treat these areas too. Avoid the area around your eyes or any broken skin.
6. When applying the treatment, focus on the:
    - skin between your fingers and toes
    - under-the-nail area (cut nails short and try using a soft toothbrush to reach these areas)
    - wrists
    - armpits
    - genitals (outside the body parts)
    - breasts
    - buttocks
7. Let the cream or liquid dry before getting dressed again.

If you are breastfeeding, wash the cream or liquid off your nipples before feeding your baby and reapply it afterwards.

To help the itch

The itching can make it hard to sleep. Your pharmacist may recommend an antihistamine called **chlorphenamine**. This may help you sleep and reduce scratching. Chlorphenamine comes as tablets and as an oral solution.

Itching can continue for up to 6 weeks after the treatment has worked. If itching continues, **crotamiton cream** may help to relieve it.

Clothing and bedding that have been in contact with permethrin or crotamiton creams can easily catch fire. Avoid smoking or going near unprotected flames when you are using them. Washing your clothing and bedding at a high temperature may not completely remove the cream or liquid.

Always read the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine.
If you think a medicine is causing side effects, tell a doctor, nurse or pharmacist. You can also report side effects using the Yellow Card app or at yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk.

To stop scabies spreading

While you are being treated:

- advise anyone you have had close contact with over the past month to get treatment, even if they have no symptoms
- wash all bedding, towels and clothes at 60°C (or above)
- dry your washed items in a hot tumble dryer
- seal any items that cannot be washed in a plastic bag for at least 72 hours before using them again
- stay away from work or school for 24 hours after the first treatment
- avoid close physical contact until you have completed the treatment course
- do not share bedding, clothing or towels

When to Get Help

Ask for a GP appointment if you or your child:

- still have itchy skin 6 weeks after treatment has finished
- have finished 2 courses of treatment and they have not worked

Ask for an urgent GP appointment or call 111 if you or your child:

- start to feel very unwell
- develop crusts on the skin, or pus or fluid is leaking out
- develop very sore and swollen skin or skin that feels hotter than usual

If you are worried that your or your child's condition is not getting better, or is getting worse, talk to your GP.

More information

For more information on scabies or a medicine, talk to your pharmacist or look at the following websites:

British Association of Dermatologists: www.bad.org.uk/pils/scabies
NHS 111 Wales: 111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/s/article/scabies/
Patient UK: patient.info/skin-conditions/skin-rashes/scabies
Medicines A-Z: www.nhs.uk/medicines/

Information from the above resources is included in this leaflet.

If you think you may have a sexually transmitted infection, you can get a free home testing kit from Sexual Health Wales (phw.nhs.wales/topic/sexual-and-reproductive-health/). Some local pharmacies also provide these kits.

Mae'r daflen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This leaflet is also available in Welsh.

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