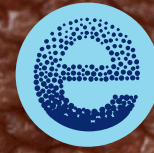


Chronic Hand Eczema 101



National
Eczema
Association

What is chronic hand eczema?

Chronic hand eczema (CHE) is an inflammatory skin condition characterized by redness, itchiness, dryness or burning on the skin of the hands or wrists. CHE is a condition that lasts for more than three months or recurs two or more times a year, causing significant discomfort.

Fortunately, there are ways to manage CHE to help prevent flare-ups.

Who gets chronic hand eczema?

CHE affects approximately 5-10% of people. It can affect anyone (even children), but women seem more frequently affected.

CHE is common among individuals who work in wet conditions, frequently wash their hands, use gloves, handle chemicals or work in extreme temperatures (e.g., healthcare, construction, manufacturing, food services, hairdressing, cleaning).



What are the different types of chronic hand eczema?

Different types of chronic hand eczema arise from various situations and triggers, often overlapping. It can be unclear which type(s) of CHE a person has or what the associated triggers are.

The main types of hand eczema are:

- **Irritant contact eczema:** The most common form of CHE, it is usually caused by irritants such as chemicals, or temperature and moisture-related conditions. Mechanics, hair stylists, nail technicians and healthcare workers may develop it due to exposure to caustic chemicals and frequent hand washing.
- **Allergic contact dermatitis:** Occurs after direct contact with allergens like fragrances, rubber chemicals, preservatives and metals. A patch test may be recommended by your healthcare provider to identify the specific allergen.
- **Atopic hand eczema:** This form of CHE is related to the immune system, genetics and skin barrier, and often occurs when people have eczema on other body areas or a history of eczema. Overlap commonly occurs between atopic hand eczema, and allergic and irritant contact eczema.
- **Protein contact eczema:** A less common form resulting from contact with proteins like meat, vegetables, flour and grains.
- **Dyshidrotic hand eczema:** This type of CHE (also known as recurrent vesicular eczema) appears as small, itchy bumps on the sides of fingers and hands filled with clear liquid, resembling tapioca pearls. Symptoms often last weeks, resolve and then recur.
- **Hyperkeratotic hand eczema:** This appears as thick patches of skin on the palms that often crack and are painful. Men are more frequently affected than women.

Is chronic hand eczema contagious?

No, CHE is not contagious. You can't catch it or spread it to others.

What are the symptoms of chronic hand eczema?

CHE varies by individual factors like skin tone, allergens and other factors, but common symptoms include:

- Pain
- Areas of redness on lighter skin tones and areas of purple or darker brown on skin of color
- Intense itch
- Stinging or burning sensations
- Dryness
- Thickening or thinning of the skin
- Cracked, scaly or crusty skin
- Swelling

What should I do if I think I have chronic hand eczema?

If you think you have CHE, discuss your symptoms, potential triggers, exposures and risk factors with your healthcare provider. Before your appointment, keep a skin diary:

- Describe symptoms, their frequency and duration. Take photos of flare-ups, rashes or wounds.
- Note activities, situations or exposures (chemicals, detergents, metals, soaps, etc.) that coincide with symptoms at home, work or school. Do symptoms improve when you take breaks or vacations?
- Describe how symptoms impact your daily life or activities.
- Make a list of ointments, lotions or treatments you have tried and any other medications you use.

Your healthcare provider may recommend patch or skin prick tests to aid in diagnosis and treatment. Together, you can explore ways to protect and manage your skin.

Is there a cure for chronic hand eczema?

CHE has no cure yet, and avoiding allergens or irritants can be challenging. However, over-the-counter and prescription treatment options are available.

You can protect your skin at home, work or school from irritants to better control and prevent eczema symptoms.

How is chronic hand eczema treated?

There are prescription therapies available specifically for CHE, along with treatments and strategies used for other inflammatory skin conditions (including atopic dermatitis) that may also help. Preventive and supportive measures are also vital for CHE care. Your healthcare provider can guide you on what's best for your situation.

Key preventive and supportive measures:

- Recognizing triggers and working to avoid or minimize exposures (when possible)
- Wearing non-irritating, protective gloves or wearing cotton liners inside gloves
- Washing hands gently
- Strengthening the skin's barrier with topical products like emollients and barrier creams

Common therapeutic options (as recommended by your healthcare provider):

- Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory creams
- Prescription topical cream specifically for CHE, or other topical medications
- Systemic medications (taken by mouth or given as an injection)
- UV light therapy, called phototherapy

The National Eczema Association is here for you

Uncontrolled CHE can negatively affect your physical and mental health. To help you live your best life with eczema, visit NationalEczema.org for resources. Explore treatment options, tips from healthcare providers, the Seal of Acceptance™ Product Directory and personal stories from others living with Eczema.

EczemaWise, an app by the National Eczema Association, helps you monitor triggers and prepare for discussions with your healthcare provider. Learn more at EczemaWise.org.