



Diagnosed with Chronic Hand Eczema (CHE)?

Here's what you need to know



National
Eczema
Association



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CHE 101

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

CHE can have multiple causes, including genetics, the immune system and exposure to irritants or allergens.

There is currently no cure for CHE, but there are treatments and skincare routines to help you manage it and help prevent flare-ups. The information in this brochure can help you get started.

CHE is not contagious; you cannot “catch it” or spread it to others.







CHE Risk Factors

CHE affects approximately 1 in 10 people. It can affect anyone (even children), but women are more frequently impacted. Having eczema on other parts of the body or having dry skin can increase a person’s risk of developing CHE. A person with asthma or allergies may also be more likely to develop certain types of CHE.

CHE is particularly common in people who work in wet conditions, frequently wash their hands, wear gloves, handle chemicals or work in extreme temperatures.

Occupations with higher CHE risk

-  Healthcare
-  Construction or metal working
-  Cosmetology
-  Farming, floral arranging or animal handling
-  Hairdressers
-  Food production
-  Cleaning or sanitation

In people under the age of 30, CHE is nearly twice as common in women than men, likely due to things women may be exposed to at work inside and outside the home.

What CHE looks and feels like

CHE symptoms vary and can depend on factors like skin tone and CHE type. Symptoms may occur anywhere on the hands and wrists. Palms, fingertips and areas between the fingers can be affected.



Common visible signs of CHE include:

- Areas of redness or darkening on lighter skin tones and areas of purple, ashen gray or darker brown on skin of color
- Dryness
- Texture differences including thickening or thinning of the skin, cracking, scaling, crusting or blistering
- Swelling

Physical sensations of CHE include:

- Pain
- Stinging or burning
- Intense itch
- Dryness

CHE can affect more than your skin. Many people with uncontrolled CHE also experience higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

Types of CHE

The main types of hand eczema are:

Irritant contact eczema: The most common type of CHE. Usually caused by contact with chemicals, extreme temperatures or frequent hand washing.

Allergic contact dermatitis: Occurs after direct contact with allergens like fragrances, rubber, chemicals, preservatives and metals.

Atopic hand eczema: This CHE is related to the immune system, genetics and the skin barrier, and often occurs when people have eczema on other body areas or a history of eczema.

Protein contact eczema: A less common form of CHE resulting from contact with proteins in meat, vegetables, flour or grains.

Dyshidrotic hand eczema: This type of CHE, also known as recurrent vesicular eczema, presents as small, itchy bumps on the sides of the fingers and hands filled with clear liquid.

Hyperkeratotic hand eczema: This appears as thick patches of skin on the palms that often crack and are painful.



It is possible to have more than one type of CHE at the same time.



Common triggers

Irritating substances, environmental and lifestyle conditions, allergens and stress can “trigger” CHE.

Substances or practices commonly linked to CHE include:



Extensive exposure to sweat or water



Frequent hand washing



Wearing certain types of gloves



Exposure to industrial or waterless hand cleansers, solvents, cleaning agents, cosmetics or acrylic nail supplies



Contact with rubber or metal allergens, such as nickel or cobalt



Hot or cold temperatures



Learn more about caring for your eczema

Visit [NationalEczema.org](https://www.nationaleczema.org) for more information about daily eczema management, treatments, eczema-friendly products and more.

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

Daily Hand Care Basics

To soothe and protect CHE-prone skin, wash and moisturize your hands and wrists carefully and avoid common triggers. The following tips and techniques can help:

Washing



Choose lukewarm water, not hot



Use fragrance- and dye-free, gentle cleansers for sensitive skin



Do not scrub



Rinse thoroughly



Pat dry



Apply a fragrance-free thick cream or ointment moisturizer after every hand wash

Find eczema-friendly products

The right skincare and household products can make a difference. Browse eczema-friendly cleansers and moisturizers that have been awarded the National Eczema Association's Seal of Acceptance™ by visiting [EczemaProducts.org](https://www.eczema.org/products).



Moisturizing

Keeping your hands well-moisturized is one of the most important steps in managing CHE. Not all moisturizers work the same way:

Lotions are not the best choice for skin affected by CHE because they are the lightest moisturizers and often have low oil content. Lotions may also contain alcohol or fragrances which can burn sensitive or irritated skin.

Creams are water and oil-based and are very good at sealing in moisture. Some creams are infused with lipids and ceramides, which are naturally occurring substances found in healthy skin barriers. Lipids and ceramides form a protective layer on the skin to help lock in moisture and keep out irritants.

Ointments have the highest oil content of all moisturizers. They are very good at sealing in moisture. Products high in oil content, such as petroleum jelly and mineral oil, are particularly good for treating CHE. Apply healing ointments to irritated skin as often as necessary.

Tip: If your hands feel too greasy after moisturizing, try wearing white cotton gloves. This helps lock in moisture while still allowing you to use your hands.

Soak + seal

Healthcare providers often recommend “soak and seal” and “wet wrap” techniques several times a week to reduce CHE flares and irritation.

What you need:



Bathtub or sink



Water



Cleanser



Towel



Topical medications



Moisturizer

Here's how to soak and seal:

1. Fill a basin with lukewarm water. Soak affected areas for five to 10 minutes.
2. Use a gentle, no-fragrance cleanser. Do not scrub skin.
3. Rinse off with lukewarm water.
4. Pat the skin lightly with a towel. Leave skin slightly damp.
5. If you are using a recommended topical medication or moisturizer, apply it as directed to affected areas. Do not apply moisturizer over areas treated with a topical medication.
6. Wait a few minutes for both to absorb into the skin, then get dressed or apply wet wraps (see next page).

Talk to your provider

Before trying soak and seals or wet wraps, consult with your healthcare provider. They can help you decide if these are good options for you and which medications are safe to use with wet wraps. For more resources on bathing and moisturizing with eczema, visit [NationalEczema.org](https://www.nationaleczema.org).

Wet wraps

Wet wrap therapy is a good option when you're having a severe CHE flare. Begin with the soak and seal method (previous page), and then add wet dressings (such as cotton gloves, socks or gauze) to affected areas. This is best done in the evening before bed.



1. Complete a soak seal.



2. Moisten a cotton dressing in warm water so it is slightly damp.



3. Apply the dressing to the area affected.



4. Wrap a dry dressing over the wet one.



5. Leave dressings on for two hours or overnight.



6. Remove wet dressings. Apply moisturizer.



Glove use

To protect skin from allergens, irritants and water, wear non-irritating, protective gloves.

- Heavy-duty vinyl or neoprene gloves are good options if you include a cotton glove liner as well.
- Wash the liners and gloves regularly if they are not disposable.
- Change gloves if the insides or liners become wet, soiled or damp with sweat.

Treatment Options

While there is currently no cure for CHE, there are ways to care for your skin and improve your symptoms. The preventive and supportive skincare techniques outlined in this brochure, along with irritant avoidance, are at the core of CHE management.

In addition, over-the-counter (OTC), prescription and other medical treatments can also be used (as recommended by your healthcare provider) to help you feel and live better with this often complex and challenging condition.

Current options include:

OTC treatments: Products you can purchase at drugstores or online without a doctor's prescription such as moisturizing creams and ointments and topical hydrocortisone (a low-potency steroid applied to the skin). When using hydrocortisone, follow the directions on the label. Do not use hydrocortisone more often or longer than recommended.

Prescription anti-inflammatory topical medications: Prescription creams, gels and lotions. Some contain stronger steroids than OTC hydrocortisone, and some are nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories, such as a new nonsteroidal topical treatment that was recently FDA-approved specifically for moderate-to-severe CHE. Talk to your healthcare provider to determine if this novel option could be right for you.

Provider Finder

Find a U.S. healthcare provider near you with experience treating CHE using the Provider Finder at [NationalEczema.org](https://www.nationaleczema.org).

Medical care for CHE is helpful because the longer symptoms continue, the more challenging they can be to treat.

UV light therapy: Also called phototherapy, this treatment uses ultraviolet (UV) light to care for eczema by helping to suppress overactive immune cells in the skin. Phototherapy is prescribed by a doctor and given at the clinic. Home-based phototherapy units may be an option as well.

Oral prescription medications: Taken by mouth, these may include medications that work on the immune system to interrupt inflammatory responses or corticosteroids to bring down inflammation.

Injectable treatments: Prescription medications given by injection. The most common injectables are "biologics," which stop or limit the immune system from generating inflammation.



Get the latest eczema news including

- Advances in research and treatments
- Lifestyle tips
- Stories from the eczema community

Visit [NationalEczema.org](https://www.nationaleczema.org) to subscribe to alerts and articles.

Living with CHE

Being diagnosed with CHE can feel overwhelming. Painful, itchy or cracked skin can make everyday tasks more difficult such as washing dishes, typing, using your phone or getting dressed.

You might be frustrated with how this condition affects your daily life, or wonder if you will ever feel “normal” again.

Beyond physical discomfort, CHE can also impact your emotional and mental well-being as well as self-confidence. This makes sense because our hands are often visible to others and essential to our daily functioning and how we interact with people at home, school and work. With CHE, it’s common to experience:

- Embarrassment over skin’s appearance
- Impacts on mood and quality of life
- Financial and time stress due to skincare needs
- Emotional from chronic symptoms
- Frequent absences from work or job loss

But you’re not alone. There is hope. The treatments and care routines shared in this brochure can help you manage CHE, reduce symptoms and improve your quality of life.



Moderate to severe CHE has been shown to impact quality of life as much as rheumatoid arthritis, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Managing CHE at work or school

CHE can create challenges at work and school, including discomfort, missed days or feeling less productive. Meanwhile, people around you may not understand CHE or its impacts.

Clear communication and informed management strategies can help:



Explain that CHE is not contagious and is not a cleanliness or hygiene issue.



Avoid irritants including chemicals, detergents, allergens and wet work.



Remove hand or wrist jewelry.



Wear protective gloves and cotton liners. Change them when damaged or damp.



Gently wash hands in lukewarm water with fragrance- and dye-free, mild soap. Pat dry.



Avoid waterless hand sanitizers.



Moisturize with thick, sensitive-skin emollient creams or ointments after every wash.



Talk to your healthcare provider about treatment options.



Talk to your employers, teachers and others about reasonable accommodations such as adjusting tasks, equipment, workstations, uniforms or schedules.

CHE is the most common work-related skin disease, especially in healthcare, food handling and beauty industries.



If you need to miss work or school for appointments or to manage severe CHE, a note from your healthcare provider can help to explain your condition, triggers or therapeutic needs.

Talking with your doctor

Although it can be difficult to talk to your healthcare provider about CHE, it's a key step to getting support and appropriate treatment.

Here are steps to help you with the conversation so you can get the care you need:

1. Keep a journal or document of your symptoms, flares, triggers and responses to treatments. You can use a notebook, journal or notes on your phone for this purpose.
2. Bring photos of your CHE and of changes to your skin over time.
3. Be prepared to discuss what makes your CHE better or worse.
4. Ask about treatment options.



Learn how to prepare for your medical appointments

Walking into the doctor's office to talk about CHE can be overwhelming. To help you make the most of your visit, you can get your thoughts and information in order beforehand, scan the QR code to learn how and discover tips for more productive conversations with your healthcare provider.



In a survey of dermatology healthcare providers, 95% agreed that moderate-to-severe CHE has a strong impact on work or home life and 93% noted that CHE impacts their patients' emotional health.



Discover the Eczema Visual Guide, the largest online tool showcasing eczema across all skin tones.

Photos that resemble your flares could be useful for your healthcare provider. You can also upload your own photos to help the guide grow. Scan here to learn more.

Finding Support and Resources

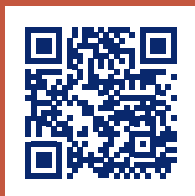
The National Eczema Association is here for you and there are many resources at [NationalEczema.org](https://www.nationaleczema.org).

Learn about treatment options, get tips from healthcare providers, use our Eczema Visual Guide, browse the Seal of Acceptance™ Product Directory, find personal stories from others living with eczema and get community support through our social media channels and at the annual Eczema Expo.





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For a complete list of all currently available
chronic hand eczema treatments visit
NationalEczema.org/Eczema/Treatment
or scan the code.

NationalEczema.org

800.818.7546 | 415.499.3474

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