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HAND DERMATITIS

Hand dermatitis (also called hand eczema) is common. Hand rashes usually result from a combination of sensitive skin and irritation or allergy from material touched. Everyone's hands routinely touch irritating soaps and detergents several times a day. Add the raw foods, solvents, paints, oils, greases, acids, glues and so on that most of us touch at work or in the home and you can see that the skin on your hands takes a beating.

Not everyone gets hand dermatitis. Many lucky people have tough skin but, unfortunately, some people have skin that is easily damaged. The result is dermatitis. People with hand dermatitis often have dermatitis elsewhere. Frequently, blood relatives also have hand dermatitis. We can't toughen your skin, but we have effective treatments to heal your dermatitis.

Skin protection is an important part of treatment. This instruction sheet gives you detailed directions on how to protect your hands. *Please read it carefully every day for one week to fix these instructions in your mind.*

1. Protect your hands from direct contact with soaps, detergents, scouring powders and similar irritating chemicals by wearing waterproof, heavy-duty VINYL gloves. (Heavy-duty vinyl gloves are recommended because you may develop an allergy to rubber). Buy 3 to 6 pairs so they can be conveniently located in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry areas. If a glove develops a hole, discard it immediately! Wearing a glove with a hole is worse than wearing no gloves at all.
2. Heavy-duty vinyl gloves are unlined. Washable cotton gloves may be purchased along with the vinyl gloves and used as an absorbent liner under them. You should have enough waterproof gloves that the insides of the gloves can dry between wearings.
3. Wear waterproof gloves while peeling and squeezing lemons, oranges or grapefruit, peeling potatoes and handling tomatoes.
4. Wear leather or heavy-duty fabric gloves when doing outdoor dry work and gardening. Dirty your gloves, not your hands. If you keep house for your family, scatter a dozen pairs of inexpensive cotton gloves about your home and use them while doing dry housework. When you get them dirty, put them in the washing machine. Wash your gloves, not your hands.

5. If you have an automatic dishwasher, use it as much as possible. If you don't, let a member of your family do the dishes. Do your laundry by machine, not by hand.
6. Avoid direct contact with turpentine, paint thinner, paints, floor polish, metal and shoe polishes. They contain irritating solvents. When using them, wear vinyl gloves.
7. When washing your hands, use lukewarm water and very little mild soap. Rinse off the soap carefully and pat dry. This is a good time to apply a moisturizer to help protect your hands and to help seal in the moisture. And remember all soaps are irritating.
8. Rings often worsen dermatitis by trapping irritation materials beneath them. Remove your rings when doing housework and before washing your hands.
9. When outdoors in cold or windy weather, wear unlined leather gloves to protect your hands from drying or chapping.
10. Use only the prescribed medicines and bland lubricants. Avoid lubricants/moisturizers that are unscented or have a long list of additives. They may irritate the skin.
11. Protect your hands for at least four months after your dermatitis has healed. It takes a long time for skin to recover and unless you are careful the dermatitis may recur.
12. One trick is to soak hands in a dish pan with room temperature water and a little bath oil added for 10 to 20 minutes at night. Then pat dry and apply a thick, bland moisturizer before the skin can air dry and then put on white cotton gloves and go to bed.
13. Use a barrier cream during the day when gloves are not practical. These are available over-the-counter. Two examples are: *Theraseal* and *Glove in a Bottle*.

There is no fast, magic treatment for hand dermatitis. Your skin must be given a rest from irritation. Follow the above instructions carefully.