

Hand Eczema or Hand Dermatitis: itchy, painful, debilitating

Hand eczema is an inflammatory condition that can cause itchy blisters, cracks, or rashes on the hands. It can go hand in hand with atopic eczema or be a result of contact dermatitis. **Contact dermatitis is more common in professions with frequent contact with water and chemicals.** E.g., Hairdressers, cleaners, healthcare workers and hospitality workers. Women are more likely than men to have another form of hand eczema called pompholyx or dyshidrotic eczema. This results in very itchy little blisters on the palms or fingers.



What causes hand eczema?

Eczema can be **influenced by our genetics** (it runs in the family) and/or by external factors, such as **irritants or allergic reactions**. **Stress** may also play a role in inflammation and flare ups.

What can you do?

Hands are tricky, as we need to use them in so many ways all day long. They deal with a lot of irritants and get very little care.

Avoidance of irritants and allergens are the first steps, followed by **management with moisturisers and medical treatments** as prescribed by your health professional. You may need to get a referral to a dermatologist or immunologist for patch testing where contact allergy is suspected.

Management tips

Moisturise frequently and treat flare ups quickly. Topical steroids are the first-line treatment of inflammation. They can provide relief from painful, cracked and itchy skin. Palms may need stronger steroids to penetrate thicker skin. Petrolatum-based ointment may help with deep cracks on the palmar surface. Follow your doctor's advice for treatment using topical steroids. Here are some eczema management tips from the Australasian College of Dermatologists.

Management Tips
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Triggers

Avoiding triggers and controlling the flare ups/inflammation are ways in which you can manage your condition. There are some common triggers for hand eczema and ways to manage these:

- **Detergents** - avoid detergents. Use a dishwasher. Get someone else to wash your hair. Cover your hands.
- **Hand washing** - use a soap substitute or your preferred moisturiser to wash hands. Dry hands well and always reapply your moisturiser after every hand wash.
- **Hand sanitiser** - frequent use can increase irritation. Opt for hand washing where possible, find a tolerated sanitiser and increase moisturiser usage.
- **Rings** - beware of rings which may contain nickel/cobalt. Rings may trap irritants on the skin.
- **Handling potential irritants** - e.g., acidic foods, detergents, dyes - cover your hands with cotton liners and protective gloves.
- **Cover your hands with cotton liners and protective gloves** whenever doing anything that may irritate the hands. E.g., when cutting acidic foods such as citrus, tomatoes or other irritant foods.



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Treatments for stubborn or out of control hand eczema

Severe disease or hand eczema that does not respond to standard topical corticosteroid therapy may require systemic treatment or phototherapy. Be sure to ask your dermatologist about your treatment options.

Here is an insight into emerging treatments that giving hope to many people living with eczema.

Emerging Treatments
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Additional support and connection

Eczema Support Australia have set up services to support adults with eczema.

Connect with other families that understand through our closed Facebook Group called "Eczema Support Australia Families Group" - www.facebook.com/groups/aussieeczemafamilies
Practical Parenting for Eczema Families - www.eczemasupport.org.au/practical-parenting-for-eczema-families/
Psychological services - www.eczemasupport.org.au/psychology-support/

Inform for more eczema information go to www.eczemasupport.org.au

Advocate to share your story or get involved with our patient support organisation - contact@eczemasupport.org.au