What You Can Do About Eczema Spread

by AILEEN BARRO

Can Eczema Spread?

If you find eczema on one area of your body, you may wonder, can eczema spread? Beyond the most common symptoms of inflammation, rashes and itching, eczema can develop or spread to various parts of the body. If you have eczema on your wrist, it can spread to your fingers or your whole arm. A rash on your neck can migrate to your face or even your eyelids. What are the possible causes of this and how do you stop eczema from spreading? Keep reading to find out more.

How Can Eczema Spread?

Eczema or atopic dermatitis refers to a chronic skin condition that typically develops in childhood. Individuals with asthma and hay fever in their families are most likely to suffer from it.

The general consensus is that this condition is inherited due to mutations in the gene that encodes filaggrin — a key protein that promotes the integrity of the skin barrier.

Without a strong, protective barrier, the skin does not retain water well and becomes vulnerable to harmful microorganisms and substances that cause allergic reactions. That is why eczema patients tend to have dry skin that is prone to irritation and infection.

Where is Eczema Commonly Located?

Eczema can affect almost any part of the body. They may develop in a particular area or spread to several areas. The commonly affected sites may change with age.

For infants and children, it can appear in these areas:

- Scalp.
- Face.
- Arms and legs.

In older children it can affect the:

- Neck.
- Wrist.
- Ankles.
- Creases of the elbows and knees.
- Legs and buttocks.

In adults, it mainly affects the:

- Hands.
- Arms.
- Feet.
- Nape of the neck.

What Causes the Spread of Eczema?

The condition is non-contagious, so you cannot pass it on to someone else. However, your rash can get bigger and spread to other parts of your body, including your face and scalp. Allergens, germs and scratching an itchy rash can trigger more inflammation that causes eczema to worsen and spread.

1. Scratching

Flare-ups are not the same for everyone. In some people, the itch can be so severe that scratching is simply unavoidable. Scratching can make your eczema worse because it triggers the release of inflammatory substances, which brings in more inflammation.

Furthermore, repeated scratching and rubbing can turn a rash into a plaque of thickened skin. This process is called lichenification.

How to Manage It
As much as possible, you want to stop the itch-scratch cycle. Oral and topical anti-itch medications are available over the counter. Some are available only by prescription. Creams, gels and ointments with low-grade steroids can reduce inflammation and relieve itching, thus preventing the spread of eczema.

2. Irritants and Allergens

Common triggers for eczema include exposure to allergens, such as pollen, animal dander, mold and dust mites. Skin irritants found in many household products, such as soaps, detergents and antibacterial cleansers, may also trigger a flare.

How to Manage It
Avoiding direct contact with an allergen or irritant is an essential step in preventing eczema flares. But, to do this, you need to figure out your triggers, which is not a straightforward process for many people. You may consult an allergist to help identify your eczema triggers through skin testing.

3. Microbes

People with dry, cracked and flaky skin are more prone to infection because the skin barrier is impaired. With atopic dermatitis, the skin is further damaged by incessant scratching. Bacteria, such as staphylococcus aureus, can easily penetrate the deeper layers of the skin, resulting in secondary infection.

How to Manage It
Infection caused by bacteria is usually treated with antibiotics. Your doctor may also prescribe antiviral or antifungal medications depending on the cause of the infection. Although you cannot spread eczema to another person, they can catch skin infection if you have an infected rash.

4. Stress

Stress does not directly cause eczema. It can, however, cause itching in people with atopic dermatitis. One explanation for how stress triggers eczema is its ability to increase inflammation in the body.

How to Manage It
There are different ways to deal with stress to avoid flare-ups. Exercise, relaxation and self-care habits help in managing stress and are also beneficial for your physical and mental health. A good night’s sleep is just as

important. Don’t forget to spend time with your family and friends on a regular basis.

When to Check in With Your Doctor

The sooner you can get your symptoms under control, the better your chances of warding off the spread of eczema. Preventing outbreaks largely depends on figuring out your triggers. But finding the cause for a flare-up may be difficult for many people. A specialist can help you in determining the cause of your eczema.

Change How You Manage Your Symptoms

Eczema usually flares during the winter months, as cold temperatures and dry air can dry out your skin. Make sure you are using an adequate amount of emollients to add moisture to your skin and prevent winter itch.

Sometimes products that you think are gentle on your skin can trigger a reaction later on. You may need to spend more effort finding the right products that are easier on your skin. Always patch test any beauty products such as makeup, serums, facial and body cleansers, lotions and shampoos before using them.

With your doctor’s guidance, it is reasonable to experiment with home remedies and alternative treatments. Some patients may experience modest improvement from the following:

- Colloidal oatmeal.
- Aloe vera.
- Virgin coconut oil.
- Petroleum jelly.
- Bleach bath.
- Apple cider vinegar.

No matter how committed you are to your treatment plan, you may lose treatment response over time. Poorly controlled eczema can lead to skin discoloration, scarring and infection.

The spread of eczema to other parts of the body is a huge challenge to patients. Those who have not had success with other therapies should consider a change in treatment. Ask your provider about newer eczema medications that may help you.