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## Scabies and its treatment

Scabies is quite a common skin condition caused by tiny insects (scabies mites) that get under the surface of the skin. The adult female burrows along and lays eggs as it goes. The eggs hatch into larvae that travel to the skin's surface, mature into adults, mate and repeat the cycle.

The path of the mite's burrow looks like a zigzag line of tiny blisters on the skin with red patches around the blisters. These appear mainly between the fingers, on the inner surfaces of wrists and elbows, in the armpits, on soles of the feet, on the bottom and on private parts. Sometimes, the head and face are also affected. The blister-like rash is the result of an allergic reaction to mites' eggs and droppings which cause severe itch all over the body. The itch is often worse when the person is warm such as after exercise or a warm bath or shower, or at night in bed, leading to loss of sleep.

Itching can be the first sign for people that they have scabies and need treatment. Because the itch takes time to develop, it means the actual infestation is likely to have occurred up to four to six weeks earlier, without people realising what it is. During this time before the itch starts the person can pass-on mites to others and infect them and so on. In this way, many people can get scabies before they realise and get treatment. If you get scabies a second time or more, the itch develops more quickly, usually within a few days. The itch can be so bad, and people scratch so much, that bacterial skin infections can develop. If not treated, kidney and blood infections can develop.

Scabies mites spread from person-to-person by direct skin contact such as holding hands, cuddling, sleeping together, and by sharing clothes and bedding. In this way, mites spread easily to other people in the family and friends. Scabies is not considered a sign of poor personal hygiene, is hard to prevent, and will not go away without treatment. Special creams and lotions are available from your Pharmacist or on prescription from the doctor.

There are some important things to know about treating scabies. Everyone living in the house, and all people in direct physical contact with them, should be treated at the same time, even if they are not itchy. Re-infection can happen if just one person is not treated properly, and mites and eggs survive. Mites can be anywhere on the body so treatment needs to be applied to the whole body, not just areas with the blisters and rash. In some people the head and face need to be treated as well. Ask your Pharmacist about which treatment to use and how best to use it.

Even after treatment the itch can last a few weeks because the allergic reaction takes time to settle down. Follow the treatment instructions, and don't keep applying it because the skin is still itchy and you think the treatment has not worked. There could be another reason for the itch. Finally, wash clothes, towels and bedding that have been in contact with the skin in hot water.