Tips for Alleviating Itchy Skin With Multiple Sclerosis

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What Causes Itchy Skin in MS?

Do you suffer from MS and experience itchy skin? Puritus, (the medical term for itchy skin) can occur in people with MS, although is often neglected and therefore not treated. There are a few explanations as to why it happens, and also a few things you can do to manage your MS and itchy skin.

Why Does My Skin Itch?

MS is an autoimmune condition that affects the nerves. The immune system attacks the myelin sheet that protects the nerves, which causes inflammation and disrupts the signals sent from brain to the rest of the body. The symptoms will vary depending on the area of the brain that is affected, and impaired electrical impulses will lead to abnormal sensations. This is also the cause of MS numbness and tingling. MS is also associated with so called paroxysmal sensory symptoms, for example, itchiness that may come and go.

It can happen all of a sudden or in waves. The itch may be felt for a few minutes, or for longer periods of time. It can also affect different parts of the face and body, and the sensation of itchiness may move randomly from one area to another. During some itchy episodes, it may feel like you have unexplained itching all over your body. The itch will usually become worse during a flare-up of your MS.

Itchiness may also be caused by the MS drugs given via injections. If your skin becomes itchy at the injection site, it is likely because the skin got irritated when you took the drug. You may also experience itchy skin as an allergic reaction to an MS drug. In this case the itchiness is often generalized to the entire body.

Although there are no long term risks from itchy skin, this issue can be disturbing and irritating. You should avoid scratching because if you scratch your skin too much there is an increased risk for developing a skin infection. In some cases, the itching is very intense, can wake you from sleeping due to itchy skin at night, and can last from few minutes to hours while affecting different parts of the body (i.e. back of the scalp, foot, abdomen, hands)

Tips to Manage Itchy Skin at Home

- Your doctor may prescribe some medication (anticonvulsants, antidepressants, or antihistaminic drugs) in cases of severe itching. Over the counter ointments like corticosteroids usually don’t help.
- Try cool, wet compresses on the itchy skin, as they can decrease the sensation and help you avoid scratching the area.
- Lotions and ointments with camphor and eucalyptus will also give a cool sensation and help relieve the itchiness. Other home remedies that could work include coconut oil, petroleum jelly, aloe vera gel, baking soda, and apple cider vinegar, which can be applied directly on the affected area.

- Take a lukewarm bath, and add some uncooked oatmeal or baking soda to the water.
- Avoid common skin irritants (found in soaps, creams, detergents, house hold cleaners, air fresheners,

fabric softeners, and cosmetics). Use natural products free of artificial colors, dyes or perfumes. Also keep in mind that some jewelry can cause allergic reactions manifesting with itchiness.
- Avoid stress, because stress aggravates virtually all symptoms, including itchy skin. Try yoga, meditation, or breathing techniques.

Use home remedies only for mild itchiness. If you experience severe, intense itchiness, talk to your doctor to receive adequate treatment.