



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Scabies

Topic Overview

What is scabies?

Scabies is a very itchy skin condition caused by tiny [mites](#) that burrow into your skin. See a picture of [scabies](#) .

Scabies can affect people of all ages and from all incomes and social levels. Even people who keep themselves very clean can get scabies.

How is scabies spread?

[Scabies mites](#)  spread by close contact with someone who has scabies. Scabies can also be spread by sharing towels, bed sheets, and other personal belongings.

Scabies often affects several family members at the same time. You can spread it to another person before you have symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

Scabies causes severe itching that is usually worse at night. Small children and older adults tend to have the worst itching. Children typically have worse skin reactions.

If this is the first time you have had scabies, it may be several weeks before you have itching and skin sores. But if you have had it before, symptoms will probably start in a few days.

How is scabies diagnosed?

A doctor can usually diagnose scabies based on your symptoms. Scabies is especially likely if you have had close contact with other people who have had similar symptoms.

Sometimes a doctor confirms a diagnosis by looking for signs of mites on a sample of your skin. The doctor gently scrapes some dry skin from an affected area and then looks at it under a microscope. This test is not painful for most people.

How is it treated?

Scabies will not go away on its own. You need to use a special cream or lotion that a doctor prescribes. In

severe cases, your doctor may also give you pills to take.

Some scabies medicines are not safe for children, older adults, and women who are pregnant or breast-feeding. **To avoid dangerous side effects, be sure to follow your doctor's instructions carefully.**

If you have scabies, you and anyone you have close contact with must all be treated at once. This keeps the mites from being passed back and forth from person to person. You must also carefully wash all clothes, towels, and bedding.

After treatment, the itching usually lasts another 2 to 4 weeks. It will take your body that long to get over the allergic reaction caused by the mites. If you still have symptoms after 4 weeks, you may need another treatment.

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