

TIPS FOR ITCHING

Itching can be an incredibly annoying and difficult to treat problem. It can have any number of causes, some of which may not be readily apparent. However, regardless of the cause, you can do a great deal to relieve itching if you follow these recommendations.

1. Do not scratch! Obviously, that's easier said than done, but the suggestions below will give you some things to do instead of scratching. The more you scratch, the more you'll itch; eventually, even if you take away the original cause of itching, you'll continue to itch just because of the scratching.
2. Do not use rubbing alcohol! This is a common folk remedy for itching, but it is very drying, and actually makes itching worse.
3. Tepid to cool baths and compresses are helpful for itching. Extreme cold, as well as a cold dry climate, can aggravate itching, but a cool compress will make you feel better.

4. Bathing tips:

Hot water aggravates itching. Don't *freeze* yourself, but the cooler the bathing water, the less you'll itch. You may find a tub bath more comfortable than a shower, since the water pelting down on you in the shower may aggravate itching.

Many soaps are drying, and this aggravates itching. Use **Equate Moisturizing Beauty Bar** (generic for regular **Dove Bar**); if you prefer a liquid body wash, use **Equate Deep Moisturizing Body Wash** (generic for **Dove Deep Moisturizing Body Wash**).

5. Chilled moisturizer can provide great relief for itching. Keep a jar of moisturizer in the refrigerator. Instead of scratching, rub this moisturizer onto the skin with your fingertips, making sure not to use the fingernails.

Ointment is the best choice, but many people don't like ointments because they feel greasy. **Equate Petroleum Jelly** (generic for **Vaseline**) is a good choice.

If you don't want to use an ointment, a thick cream is the next best thing. **Equate Therapeutic Moisturizing Cream** (generic for **Eucerin Original Healing Soothing Repair Crème**). Another good non-generic option is **Cetaphil Moisturizing Cream**.

Lotions are often the moisturizer patients prefer, since they can be rubbed into the skin and are the least messy. However, while it may not make sense at first, lotions can actually aggravate itching as they evaporate, or encourage you to rub the skin too much. If you choose to use a lotion, apply gently, and try to leave a little layer on the skin instead of rubbing it in completely. A good, inexpensive lotion is **Equate Advanced Recovery Skin Care Lotion** (generic similar to **Eucerin Original Healing Soothing Repair Lotion**). Another good non-generic option is **CeraVe Moisturizing Lotion**.

6. Wet wraps are the most powerful thing you can do for itching. Wet a cotton garment or wrap, such as a towel, cut-off cotton sock, or T-shirt, and place it in the refrigerator. Apply moisturizer to the itching area, cover with the chilled garment, then cover with a dry garment. Leave on for 8 hours, or sleep in it. This is particularly good for small children, since it will help keep them from scratching.

7. Antihistamines are helpful for itching. **Diphenhydramine** (generic for **Benadryl**) is available without a prescription; follow the age-appropriate dosing on the bottle, or other directions given by your doctor. Note that this can make you a bit sleepy, however. If sleepiness is a problem, the nonsedating antihistamine **loratadine** (generic for **Claritin**) can be helpful. It is available without a prescription; follow the age-appropriate dosing on the bottle, or other directions given by your doctor. Other over-the-counter antihistamines may also be used. Your doctor may give you other medications as well.

8. Avoid **Neosporin** and generic **bacitracin/neomycin/polymyxin B** ointments! These don't do anything for itching. More importantly, many patients quickly become allergic to the ingredient *neomycin*, making problems worse. (If you ever need an over-the-counter antibiotic ointment, get generic **bacitracin/polymyxin B (Polysporin)** ointment instead.)