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News and Resources

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What to Do About Cosmetic Allergies

Are you allergic to any skin-care products? How would you know?

People can develop allergies to skin-care products rather suddenly, even to applications they've used for years without adverse reaction, according to Dr. Saida Baxt, a dermatologist with Paramus, N.J.-based Baxt CosMedical NJ.

Though cosmetic allergies may sneak up on you, you'll know it when one arrives. Typically within 24-48 hours of contact, "the skin will become red and inflamed, sometimes blistering, then settle down and scale off after use of the substance is stopped," says Dr. Baxt.

If you're looking for pre-exposure warning signs, there really aren't any. However, most people who are allergic in general -- those with hayfever, asthma or chronic sinusitis, for example -- will also react to common cosmetic allergens. It's simply genetics. They produce more of the IgE antibody.

If you think you're susceptible, you may want to consider using "hypoallergenic" skin-care products. Take note, though, these are not proof-positive against allergic reactions. Rather, hypoallergenic products simply do not contain the allergens to which people ordinarily respond.

To be sure, your dermatologist can test you for a reaction to specific allergens. Your doctor will apply allergens to your skin under occlusion (so as to prevent their spreading) and evaluate the reaction of your skin after 48 hours. Most cosmetic companies will also supply you with a patch test kit to determine for which specific chemical in a product you are sensitive.

If you think that you do have a cosmetic allergy, make an appointment to see your dermatologist, says Dr. Baxt. He will help you investigate your options. Most often, people react to preservatives, formaldehyde, nickel, epoxy glue and fragrances. People with fair, dry skin, especially where the skin has been irritated or broken, are most susceptible. The winter is generally the most troublesome season for cosmetic allergies. And, of course, people who use a number of different products are more prone to developing them.



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