

How to Manage **Itchiness** at Home

This guide will help you understand:

What is itchiness?

What causes itchiness?

What you can do to help manage your itchiness.

When you should talk to your healthcare team.

One:carepath gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

What is itchiness?

Itchiness is common in people with certain advanced chronic diseases. Itching or itchiness is a feeling or urge to scratch. The medical term for feeling itchy is pruritus. You may feel itchy in one place on your body or you can feel itchy all over. Feeling itchy for some people can be annoying or distracting, for others it can feel very intense and affect their quality of life.



Tell your healthcare team if you have itchiness and are finding it difficult to manage.

What causes itchiness?

Some causes of itchiness might be:

- **Chronic conditions:** Such as liver or kidney disease because of a buildup of toxins in your blood.
- **Medications:** Like pain medications called “opioids” (such as morphine and fentanyl) and some blood pressure medication.
- **Treatments:** Itchiness can be a side effect of cancer treatments.
- **Skin conditions:** Like dry skin, eczema, an allergic rash or a break in the skin.

What you can do to help manage your itchiness.

Managing itchiness works best when you play an active role.

- Try to figure out if there is a cause for your itchiness.
- Is it better or worse at different times?
- What helps or makes it worse?
- You may want to use a symptom diary to record information about your itchiness. Tracking this information will help you talk to healthcare team about your itchiness.

Physical steps you can try:

- **Medication:** If you take medication for your itchiness, take it as prescribed so your symptom doesn't get too bad.
- **Baths are preferred to showers:** Bathe for at least 15 minutes every day in lukewarm water.
- **Choose gentle cleaners:** Use gentle cleansers such as CeraVe® or Cetaphil®, and use them only on the parts of your body that really need cleaning (such as sweaty areas like armpits and groin). Otherwise, just use water to wash.

- **Gently pat your skin to dry:** Leave your skin damp and moisturize your skin soon after you have bathed.
- **Use hypoallergenic moisturizers:** With ceramides such as CeraVe®, that have no scents or other additives. Do not use the cream on areas of broken skin.
- **Use mild detergents:** For washing your clothes and bedding, make sure that they are well rinsed.
- **Wear loose lightweight clothing:** Choose cotton clothes and bedding if you can.
- **Keep your home cool and humid:** Your itchiness might feel worse if you are too warm or its dry, especially in the winter.
- **Try not to scratch:** Keep finger nails short and try massaging your skin rather than scratching. Try wearing gloves at night to stop you scratching yourself in your sleep.

Mental activities you can try:

- **Distract yourself:** Do something that you enjoy to try and keep yourself mentally busy. For example, crossword puzzles, Sudoku, needlework or video games.
- **Relax:** Try meditation, mindfulness, or relaxation therapy. Learning to relax and to change the way you think may help you cope with itchiness.

Relaxation techniques you can try at home.

Ask if someone on your healthcare team can help you get started. You can also learn some on your own. Some techniques include:

- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group.
- **Deep breathing exercises:** Slow your breathing to the point where you are as relaxed in your breathing as possible. Breaths should be deep and fill your lungs.
- **Meditation:** Sit or lie in a comfortable position for 20 minutes. Be aware of your

breathing, your sensations (including your itchiness), your thoughts and feelings.

- **Guided Imagery:** Form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation.
- **Yoga:** Can relax your breathing, ease muscle tension, and energize your mind and body.
- **Massage:** Helps reduce all over muscle tension and pain, which can help you relax.
- **Hydrotherapy:** Uses flowing water to relax muscles.
- **Music and art therapy:** Listening, playing music, drawing and painting can help you to relax.

When you should talk to your healthcare team.

Speak with your healthcare team if itchiness is a problem for you. Your worries and questions are important to you and them. Your healthcare team may speak to you about the different medications you can take.

- Let them know if you think your medical condition or medications are the reason for your itchiness.
- Let your healthcare team know if a medication is working for you or if you're having side effects. You may have to try a few different ones to know what works best for you.
- Talk to them before taking over-the-counter medication, including vitamins and herbal remedies.

Tips on sharing your symptoms with your healthcare team:

Make some notes about your itchiness symptoms and tell your healthcare team about them.

- Has there been a change in your itchiness?
- What does your itchiness feel like? How bad is it?
- When does it happen and how long does it last?
- What makes it better or worse? What have you tried already?
- Make a list of all the medications you are taking including over the counter medications.

Notes: _____
