



# Scabies

June 2016

Scabies is an allergic response to a small mite called *Sarcoptes scabiei*. The female mite tunnels into the skin and lays her eggs. The eggs hatch into mites after a few days.

## How do you get scabies?

- Scabies is transferred from person to person by direct skin contact with an infected person.
- The symptoms can take up to 6 weeks to develop.
- During this time you are infectious to others.

## What are the symptoms?

- Itching is often severe. Itchy skin tends to be in one area at first (often the hands), and then spreads to other parts of the body. The itch tends to be worse at night
- Most patients will also have blisters. These are commonest on the fingers and webs of the hand, but may also be found on the wrists, elbows, armpits, buttocks, thighs and feet.
- The head is not usually affected except in babies, the elderly, and people with a poor immune system.

## Who should be treated?

- The affected person **and**
- All household members and sleeping/sexual partners of the affected person - *even if they have no symptoms, as close contacts may be infected without symptoms, and may pass on the mite.*

**Everyone should be treated at the same time**

## What is the treatment?

- The usual treatment is either a cream containing permethrin or a lotion containing malathion. These will kill the mite.
- You can buy them from pharmacies or on prescription. Tell the pharmacist or doctor if treatment is for pregnant or breastfeeding women, or babies under 6 months.
- Re-apply the same treatment seven days after the first application. This helps to make sure that all the mites are killed.
- The treatments usually work well if used properly.
- However, it is normal to take up to 2-3 weeks for the itch to go completely after the mites have been killed by treatment.
- A soothing cream may help until the itch eases. An antihistamine medicine may also be useful to help you sleep if itching is a problem at night. A pharmacist can advise about these.
- See a doctor if the itch persists longer than 2-3 weeks after treatment.
- Sometimes the first treatment does not work, and a different one is then needed. However, the common reasons why treatment fails or scabies recurs are:
  - the cream or lotion was not put on correctly for the full time, or
  - a close contact was not treated at the same time, and the infection passed back and forth.

## Guide to successful treatment

- Follow the instructions on the packet.
- You need to treat all the skin of your body (including the back, soles of the feet, between fingers and toes, under fingernails, scalp, neck, face, ears, and genitals).
- An adult needs at least 30 g of cream or 100 ml of lotion to cover the whole body. So, for two applications you will need at least 60 g of cream or 200 ml of lotion per adult.
- Apply the cream or lotion to cool dry skin. Do not have a hot bath beforehand as this can make the treatment less effective.
- The cream or lotion should be left on for the full recommended time. Depending on which one you use, this may be between 8 and 24 hours.
- If you wash your hands or any other part of your body during the treatment period, you should re-apply the cream or lotion to the washed areas.
- Clothes, towels, and bed linen should be machine washed after the first application of treatment.
- Items that cannot be washed should be kept in plastic bags for at least 72 hours to contain the mites until they die. It is not necessary to fumigate furniture, pets, or carpets.