

## Pruritus: Why Am I Itching?

### What is pruritus?

Pruritus (proo-RYE-tis) is itchy skin or a feeling that you need to scratch. It might hurt and can cause sleep problems and depression if it becomes severe.

### What causes it?

Many conditions cause itching; some common causes:

- Skin conditions like dry skin or eczema
- Allergic reactions to food, detergents, cosmetics, soaps, medicines
- Parasites or bugs like lice and scabies
- Insect bites
- Certain cancers
- Liver, kidney, and thyroid disease
- Nerve issues
- Pregnancy

### How is pruritus treated?

Some of the following home care measures may help:

- Avoid items that may be causing the itching, like perfumes, soaps, or detergents.
- Limit water exposure. Try to keep baths and showers short, less than 20 minutes. Avoid hot water; use lukewarm water instead.
- Use gentle moisturizing creams or ointments (such as petroleum jelly) often, especially after bathing.

- Apply cool compresses to itchy areas.
- Keep your bedroom cool at night while you sleep.

### When should I see my doctor if I am itching?

- You have severe itching with no obvious cause
- Itching does not get better with home care measures
- Your skin is red, swollen, warm, or leaking fluid
- You are older than 65 years
- You have fevers or weight loss

### What will happen at my doctor's visit?

Your doctor will ask you about the itching and will examine you. You may need skin tests to help figure out why you are itching.

Your doctor may prescribe a cream, ointment, or pill to stop the itching or treat a skin infection.

### Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Family Physicians  
<https://familydoctor.org/condition/pruritus>

MedlinePlus: Itching  
<https://medlineplus.gov/itching.html>

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology  
<https://www.aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/library/allergy-library/what-makes-us-itch>

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