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How to Tell If Your Blisters Are Actually Dyshidrotic Eczema

There are a few major differences.



Pause for a second and think about the *loong* list of things you use your hands for every day. Then consider how annoying and difficult it would be to accomplish those tasks if your palms were covered in small, incredibly itchy blisters. Ditto for your feet. Unfortunately, this is just life for some people with dyshidrotic eczema.

If you haven't heard of this kind of eczema, don't worry, it doesn't mean you're out of the loop. Though there are a few different forms of the condition, atopic dermatitis (often thought of as "classic eczema") typically takes center stage. But dyshidrotic eczema, also called dyshidrosis, can be just as frustrating as its more well-known relative. Here are a few important things you should know about dyshidrotic eczema, plus what to do if you suspect you have it.

What is dyshidrotic eczema, and who's most likely to get it?

Dyshidrotic eczema happens when your skin can't protect itself as well as it should, so it gets itchy, dry, and erupts into teeny tiny blisters, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). People with this condition usually develop small blisters on their palms and the sides of their fingers, but sometimes the blisters can show up on the soles of their feet, too.

These blisters typically last for up to three weeks, according to the Mayo Clinic, and they come with another dyshidrotic eczema hallmark: "[They're] typically very, very itchy," Bruce A. Brod, M.D., clinical professor of dermatology and co-director of the Occupational and Contact Dermatitis Program at Penn Medicine, tells SELF.

Doctors don't know why some people get dyshidrotic eczema and others don't, Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a diplomate of the American Board of Dermatology and president and CEO of Advanced Skin Care and Dermatology Inc., tells SELF. That said, there are a few things that can raise your risk of developing the condition, per the AAD:

- Being between 20 and 40 years old
- Having atopic dermatitis, contact dermatitis (skin inflammation that happens after you touch an irritating substance), or hay fever (experiencing an allergic response to indoor or outdoor allergens)
- A family history of dyshidrotic eczema
- Having sweaty or moist hands
- Wetting your hands throughout the day for work
- Working with cement
- Working with metals like chromium, cobalt, or nickel

What are common dyshidrotic eczema symptoms?

Dyshidrotic eczema has a few distinct signs you should know, especially to distinguish it from other health conditions:

1. For starters, those blisters on your hands and maybe feet: You can tell these apart from other blisters in a pretty specific way. "Blisters from dyshidrotic eczema have been described as [looking like] tapioca pudding," Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, tells SELF.

These blisters, which Dr. Brod notes are a sign of acute inflammation in your epidermis (the top layer of your skin), are usually small and clustered, but they can join together and become larger blisters as well, the Mayo Clinic says. They can leave behind scaly skin once they dry out, then bubble up again before your skin is even fully healed.

2. An itchy or burning sensation: You can have this either before your blisters pop up or after they've shown up, the AAD says. These sensations are part of your body's immune reaction to your skin inflammation, Dr. Bailey explains.

3. Excessive sweating where the blisters appear: Your palms and soles have a high concentration of sweat glands and, when either area is irritated, you can sweat more than usual, Dr. Brod explains. Unfortunately, this can make

things even worse. “Increased sweating while you have the inflammation that leads to [dyshidrotic eczema] will lead to bigger blisters and more blisters,” Dr. Bailey says.

4. Pain in the blistered areas: The inflammation that comes with dyshidrotic eczema can irritate the nerve endings in your hands and feet, Dr. Brod explains. As a result, it can be pretty uncomfortable. For people with more severe cases of this condition, it can be so bad that they can have trouble doing basic things like washing the dishes or walking, the AAD says.

5. Scaly, peeling skin: When the blisters clear up, that top layer of your skin has to heal. “This layer grows from the bottom out, and the damaged part gets shed as scales,” Dr. Bailey explains, adding that the left behind skin can seem crusty, too.

It’s possible to have a flare of dyshidrotic eczema for seemingly no reason, Dr. Bailey says, but some people experience these symptoms in response to certain triggers like stress and exposure to hot, humid weather, the AAD says.

If I think I have dyshidrotic eczema, how do I get a diagnosis?

To get a proper dyshidrotic eczema diagnosis, you’ll need to see a dermatologist. If your dyshidrotic eczema is flaring or in the process of healing, your dermatologist can probably diagnose it just by looking at your skin, the AAD says. It’s also pretty likely that they’ll ask about factors like your medical history, work, hobbies, and how stressed out you’ve been lately to make sure their diagnostic hunch is correct.

Depending on your specific symptoms and answers to the doctor’s questions, they may want to run some tests to rule out other health conditions like allergies or a fungal issue, the Mayo Clinic says.

What might my doctor suggest to treat my dyshidrotic eczema?

There’s no cure for dyshidrotic eczema—womp womp—but it is treatable. One of the best things you can do is to try to ID your triggers and then avoid them, Dr. Goldenberg says. That can mean taking measures like wearing gloves when you do certain things that would wet your hands, such as washing the dishes, Dr. Bailey says. But sometimes it’s pretty much impossible to stay away from triggers, like if your job involves getting your hands wet all the time sans gloves or if you’re just really stressed out right now.

In that case, there are a few treatment options for dyshidrotic eczema that you may want to consider. They include corticosteroids pills or creams to help battle inflammation, anti-itch drugs or lotions, and wet compresses to soothe your skin, among others, the Mayo Clinic says. Since everyone is different, don’t try to tackle this on your own. It’s really best to work with your doctor and design a treatment plan that, hopefully, makes these blisters a relic of your past.