



Cosmetic Reactions

Allergic contact dermatitis results from an allergy to a specific ingredient in a product. Redness, swelling, intense itching, and blisters may result. An allergic reaction can arise with the first several applications of a product, or after years of use. (This is because your immune system must be exposed to the allergen before an allergic reaction can occur. No one is allergic to their first dose of penicillin – it's the second dose or any dose after that which becomes the problem if you develop an allergy). It may take several days for the rash to appear after exposure of the skin to the offending allergen. The reaction will continue to worsen if you do not stop using the product. Be aware that it is possible for a manufacturer to change an ingredient in a product without changing the name or basic label design. You have to read ingredients lists carefully if you have allergies. FYI, if the skin is overdry or irritated, the skin barrier is less protective and an allergic reaction is more likely to occur. The most common causes of allergic cosmetic reactions are fragrances, preservatives in products, and lanolin.

Irritant contact dermatitis, while it can result in result in burning, itching, and redness, is not an allergic reaction. Bath soaps, deodorants, eye cosmetics, moisturizers, prescription and over the counter “skin rejuvenation” products, permanent hair-waving solutions, permanent hair color, and shampoos are the most common skin irritants. **Irritant dermatitis is much more common than allergic contact dermatitis.** There is no diagnostic test for irritant dermatitis, just trials of avoidance. Soap and water are the most common culprits.

There are ways to test and to reintroduce your suspect products, so do not throw away anything yet. Clean your face with _____. Wash your hair with _____. If you use make-up and hairspray, use Almay. Remember, try to keep it down to the bare basics. Avoid any other sprays or perfumes. Do not use a sunscreen until the rash clears. Wear a hat if you are outside. For a moisturizer use _____.

Once your rash is clear, add back one previously used product a week in this fashion: For the first day, apply the product to the inner arm. If you do not react, repeat on the second day. If still no reaction, you may use the product for a week. As long as you do not react, continue in this way until you have reintroduced all of the “retired” products that you desire to continue using.

It is important to realize you may be able to reintroduce all of your “retired” products. This does not mean you may not react again. Often it takes heat, sweating, or rubbing to precipitate a reaction. If you should react a second time, switch to a hypoallergenic line. Almay, Revlon, and several other companies have hypoallergenic products. If you cannot find products you like or can tolerate I will discuss patch testing. This can be difficult and is not always helpful in finding makeup products for everyday use.

Practical recommendations: Use powder cosmetics with matte finish, water removable cosmetics, silicone based liquid foundation, black pencil eyeliner, black mascara, and earth tone eye shadow. Use products containing no more than ten ingredients. Use only zinc oxide and titanium dioxide containing sunscreens (“chemical free”). **Avoid** nail polishes and anything with fragrances. Include Almay nail polish if you must.

For Questions or Emergency Care:

Call the office at **601-815-3374**. You may need to speak with the doctor on-call.