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Your Health

Is your child left-handed?
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Prevent and cure summer skin rashes

How to **Bounce** back

Summer skin rashes

Fun in the sun can bring more than a bad burn: rashes, hives and even warts may be the health price of a day at the beach. Here's how to ward off these warm-weather woes

on your hands, feet, face and legs.

Over-the-counter wart-removers are a safe and sometimes effective treatment. If warts won't go away, a dermatologist can get rid of them in minutes by applying salicylic acid or liquid nitrogen, which makes warts peel off.

In some people, the sun activates the body's defenses, which launch a rash where the sun shines on exposed skin. This eruption is an allergy to certain wavelengths of ultraviolet light. The rash can be bumpy, itchy or red.

The redness is caused by the swelling of tiny blood vessels (capillaries), part of a chain reaction triggered by histamine. Histamine, in concert with other chemicals in the body, produces an allergic reaction, such as swelling, hives or redness.

The sun can also bring on raised skin bumps in large patches of red skin—solar urticaria, or hives from the sun, which is Devera's

Devera Pine put on shorts and went out to enjoy the first warm day of spring, but within minutes, her legs were red and itchy. The next time she wore shorts, the same thing happened.

Devera had no idea what was causing the rash—perhaps an allergic reaction to something she ate? Or maybe to medicine, or to her soap or skin lotion?

But after hearing about her symptoms, Devera's doctor knew the root of her rash and how to get rid of it. She had solar urticaria, a sun allergy. "Stay in the shade," he advised.

"So when I went to Florida, I sat under a huge umbrella with a towel over my legs the whole time," Devera says. "Now I wear sunscreen every day and dread the switch from pants to shorts."

Just when you feel like slipping into something bare, along comes one of summer's nasty rashes. Though the timing couldn't be worse, at least help is at hand.

Here's how to handle summer skin breakouts, courtesy of O. J.

the Advanced Skin Care Institute and University of Minnesota Medical School in Minneapolis.

Sun spots

The sun: it's the skin's public enemy number one! Not only can it burn or blister your skin, but sometimes the sun acts like a switch that revs up or turns down the immune system.

In certain individuals, the sun slows the immune system so it does not effectively fight off the human papilloma virus that causes warts. You may grow a crop of these flat, raised skin bumps during the summer months, mostly

Don't go for the burn

If you spend too much time in the sun, Old Sol will leave his calling card: a sunburn.

When your skin is burned by the sun's ultraviolet rays, your blood vessels dilate and send healing blood to the area—"the way the Red Cross rushes to the scene of a disaster," says dermatologist O. J. Rustad.

To put out the flame, try cool water

or cold compresses, lotions, anesthetic or cortisone creams. Or take an anti-inflammatory drug like Nuprin, which can reduce swelling.

Protection, however, is the best policy. To stave off sunburn, wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen. The greater the SPF, the higher the protection and the longer you can stay out in the sun without burning.

UPDATE

Jump for fitness

If the kids' pogo stick is still in the garage or up in the attic somewhere, it may well provide a great workout for you.

Joseph M. Ponte, a kinesiologist (movement expert) at Kansas State University, found that jumping on a pogo stick delivers a rousing low-impact workout and helps tone the legs.

Even better news is that the pogo stick is just as effective as the thousand-dollar exercise machine you wish you could afford. So get a jump on the next exercise craze!

Female condom caution

The soon-to-be-available female condom will give women another form of contraception to choose from, but potential users should be aware of a big drawback: it's even *less* effective than the diaphragm in preventing pregnancy.

In the course of a year, one woman in four who use the female condom will become pregnant. (Three out of four sexually active women who don't use any form of contraception become pregnant within a year.)

Vitamin E and exercise

A dose of vitamin E may do the trick when it comes to decreasing post-workout pain. According to the health newsletter

Environmental Nutrition, soreness and inflammation after vigorous exercise may be caused by bad-news molecules called free radicals. As you exercise, oxygen flows through your muscles, and free radicals are produced that wreak havoc on your tissues.

Two recent studies found that taking 800 to 1,000 international units of vitamin E before a workout neutralizes these tissue-damaging molecules, thus reducing inflammation.

If a summer outing has resulted in a skin problem, you may need to see your doctor for appropriate medication.

problem. The reaction can continue for hours.

Antihistamines (which prevent histamine from acting) and cortisone may bring relief. For some lucky people, sun reactions get less severe as their bodies get used to the sizzling summer sun. For other sufferers, avoidance is the only effective treatment.

If you're sensitive to the sun, get into the habit of wearing a broad-spectrum sunscreen

(one that protects against UVA and UVB light) with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Stay out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.—the time when the sun is the strongest—and, at the beach, cover up like a mummy.

Dangers of the deep

Do you spend a lot of time in the water? Then you may be acquainted with bathing-suit bottom and swimmer's itch.

Sitting around in a wet swimsuit can cause tiny little red bumps to appear where your suit kept water in contact with your skin. The rash is a reaction to microscopic organisms in salt water.

Swimmer's itch is similar, except that it occurs on exposed skin and usually erupts after you swim in fresh water. "One organism prefers to be in a wet, dark place, like under your swimsuit, while the other likes exposed skin," explains Dr. Rustad.

No matter which nuisance causes the unsightly bumps, treatment is the same. Stay out of the water until the rash heals. Antihistamines, calamine lotion, and cortisone and anesthetic creams can relieve the itch.

To prevent these rashes, slather yourself with petroleum jelly before entering the water or "immediately shower and towel dry after you swim," advises Dr. Rustad. Or swim only in a pool—parasites can't survive chlorine.

Heat rashes

When you get hot, your body's natural air conditioner—perspi-

ration—kicks in. Sometimes too much sweat builds up in the crook of your arm, behind your knee or between your breasts.

Then small red bumps pop up because the sweat can't escape its gland. "It's like a teakettle full of boiling water, with the lid on," says Dr. Rustad.

To prevent a heat-induced rash, wear lightweight clothing made with fibers that breathe, like cotton or linen. Cool off in an air-conditioned room after heavy exercise or prolonged exposure to high heat, and dust on body powder.

With these strategies to guard against warm-weather woes, you can make sure a summer outing is a pleasurable, rather than a painful, experience.

—Joan Lippert

Year-round rashes

Some rashes can pop up any time, but may get worse in summer sun, heat and water:

● **Athlete's foot.** This scaly, red, itchy rash on your feet is caused by a fungus that thrives in heat and humidity. *Treatment:* dry feet thoroughly, wear sandals and use athlete's foot powder.

● **Fever blisters.** Blisters, crusts and scabs around the mouth are from a virus that is activated when the immune system is down. Sun, stress and lack of sleep make them worse. *Treatment:* prescription acyclovir ointment or tablets; lysin tablets.

● **Hives.** Red, itchy welts result from an allergy triggered by sun, exercise, stress, foods and insect bites. *Treatment:* antihistamines.

● **Hot tub folliculitis.** Small, red, itchy pimples are caused by bacteria that thrive in dirty hot water. *Treatment:* oral antibiotics.

● **Bug bites.** Flea bites occur in threes; chigger bites are usually below the knees; scabies bite in body creases like the groin; spider bites usually appear alone. *Treatment:* cortisone cream (for flea, chigger and spider bites); prescription antiscabies lotion.

● **Lupus.** This red, butterfly-shaped rash across the cheeks is caused by an immune-system attack on the skin, and the sun only aggravates it. Avoid the sun to prevent skin damage. *Treatment:* cortisone cream.

● **Ringworm.** This spreading ring of scaling skin is from a fungus. *Treatment:* over-the-counter (OTC) antifungal medications.

● **Tinea versicolor.** Scaly skin on the chest, back or upper arms that's lighter or darker than normal is caused by yeastlike organisms. *Treatment:* OTC antifungal cream or antiyeast shampoos (which contain selenium sulfite).

Little lefties

Children who favor their left hand could be in danger.

One study found that lefties are almost twice as likely as righties to end up in the hospital emergency room for injuries. The primary reason is that they get hurt using tools designed for right-handed people, such as scissors, knives and paper cutters, explains Stanley Coren, Ph.D., a psychologist at Canada's University of British Columbia.

Another cause for lefty accidents: "Right-handed people prefer to move in a clockwise direction, but lefties go counterclockwise," says Dr. Coren. "If a righty mom is carrying hot soup and a lefty child dodges her in a way she didn't expect, he or she will get scalded."

Don't try to protect your left-handed child by forcing him to use his right hand, cautions Dr. Coren. "Changing handedness stresses the child badly, and you may end up with a kid who stut-

ters or even turns delinquent."

The tactic won't work anyway, because the hand you favor is programmed into your brain. If your left brain is stronger, you're right-handed, and vice versa.

Infants prefer one hand over another even before they're born—in a study of Irish babies in the womb, 1 out of 20 sucked its left thumb. (About 3 out of 20 kids are lefties.)

Though most lefties are born that way, prolonged labor, prematurity or Caesarean delivery may encourage some children to favor their left hand after birth. Lefties are more likely to have immune disorders, allergies, rashes and infections—connected, Dr. Coren thinks, to the same birth traumas that made them southpaws.

To keep a little lefty safe, be sure he or she has left-handed scissors and other tools. Speak up if you see your child being forced to use equipment that's dangerous for her or him. And make sure your child's teachers know you like your lefty that way.



Being left-handed doesn't just start the moment your little one picks up a spoon or bat. Most lefties are born that way. While in the womb, they suck their left thumb.

DID YOU KNOW . . .

Bacteria on board!

Do you use a plastic cutting board because you think it's more sanitary than wood? University of Wisconsin researchers found that a few minutes after they contaminated both kinds with bacteria that cause food poisoning, the germs on the wood were gone. The plastic board, however, was dangerously contaminated.

Hip facts

About 280,000 Americans, mostly women over 65, break a hip each year. Up to 60% go to a nursing home, many to stay; up to 27% die of complications; about half need a cane or walker. To prevent hip fractures, get calcium, exercise and slip-proof your home.