

## ***Who has pruritus?***

Pruritus affects people of all age groups, from children to the elderly. Skin diseases are the cause for itching in most children. Pruritus is known to be the leading dermatological symptom during pregnancy. However, it is most common in elderly adults with dry skin, kidney or liver diseases and those taking drugs<sup>1</sup>.

## ***Which skin conditions are pruritic?***

There are a large number of dermatological conditions that result in mild to severe pruritus, ranging from atopic dermatitis, psoriasis and urticaria to skin lymphoma. The affected skin often has visible changes due to scratching such as excoriations, bleeding, crusts or even pruriginous lesions<sup>2</sup>.

## ***Classifications***

Pruritus is mainly separated into three clinical groups: pruritus on diseased skin, pruritus on non-diseased skin and skin with chronic scratch lesions. A disease category can be provided after the patient has been assigned to a group.

This greatly assists in making a diagnosis<sup>2</sup>.



## **Task Force Pruritus**

For more information, visit:

[www.taskforcepruritus.org](http://www.taskforcepruritus.org)

[www.facebook.com/PrurigoNodularisLeague](https://www.facebook.com/PrurigoNodularisLeague)

[www.itchforum.net](http://www.itchforum.net)

The logo for the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology (EADV). It consists of the letters 'EADV' in a bold, serif font, centered between two horizontal lines.

A Special Interest  
Group of the EADV



## **Task Force Pruritus**

## ***What is pruritus?***

Pruritus is the medical term for itch. It is a sensation resulting in an intense need to scratch. It is also found in a large range of medical fields. Acute pruritus lasts 6 weeks or less. It is classified as 'chronic' when it persists longer than 6 weeks. Itching is an alarm signal for the body that warns something is wrong<sup>1</sup>.

## ***What causes it?***

A specific cause can remain unknown, but it often appears in connection with dermatological, systemic, neurological, and psychiatric illnesses. It is also a side effect of many drugs. Even just dry skin can result in persistent itching<sup>2</sup>!

## How is it diagnosed?

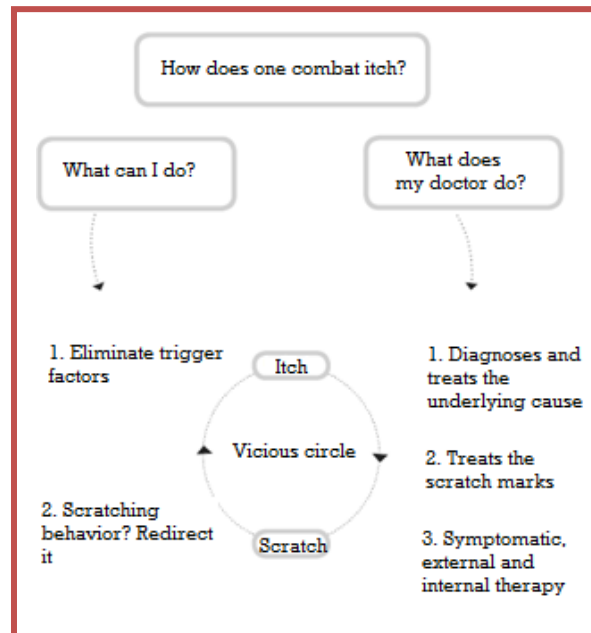
Physicians take a structured clinical history and conduct a physical examination of the patient. Various tests can then be recommended to find the cause for the pruritus, ranging from breath and blood tests to X-ray examinations<sup>3</sup>.

## How is it treated?

There are many interdisciplinary treatment methods available depending on the severity and cause for the pruritus. Dry skin can be treated with moisturizing creams, while some people require special medications for nerve damage causing itch. Antidepressants, antihistamines and gabapentinoids have also proven great results on certain types of itch. It all comes down to the underlying cause<sup>3, 4</sup>.

## Facts about Pruritus

Pruritus is the most common symptom in dermatology. Surprisingly, chronic pruritus affects nearly one-fifth of the general population. The elderly represent the largest patient group suffering from pruritus. Children are the most difficult to treat<sup>5</sup>.



## Tips and tricks

- Avoid dry skin
- Avoid taking long baths; short showers are preferable
- Allow the skin to adjust to the effects provided by creams and lotions after cleansing
- Wear non-synthetic, breathable clothing
- Do not apply ice to the skin; use cold wrappings instead
- Scratching can further damage the skin but frequently cannot be avoided. It is best to seek medical help as soon as possible.
- Do not become desperate; there are societies and patient organizations that can provide more information. The homepages of the EADV and IFSI are highly recommended.

### References:

1. Yosipovitch G et al. N Engl J Med 2013;368:1625-34.
2. Stander S et al. Acta Derm Venereol 2007;87:291-4.
3. Weisshaar E et al. Acta Derm Venereol 2012;92:563-81.
4. Misery L. Curr Probl Dermatol 2016;50:35-9.
5. Mattered U et al. Acta Derm Venereol 2011;91:674-9.