Don't be So Sensitive

Is your skin prone to itching, burning and redness after using certain cosmetics or household products? You could be a little bit sensitive.

What is 'sensitive skin'? 'Sensitive skin' is a term usually used by people who find that their skin is adversely affected by using some skin care or household products. This may refer to stinging, burning, redness or tightness, or simply an uncomfortable feeling after using a certain product. “The skin will react to things like soap and makeup with the formation of eczema (itching and redness) or to allergic stimuli like pollen, animals and dust,” says Dr Adam Friedmann, Harley Street Dermatologist.

Diagnosis

When making a diagnosis of sensitive skin, dermatologists look for visible skin reactions such as bumps, erosion, or pustules, as well as redness, blushing or flushing and very dry skin in which the nerve endings aren't properly protected. Diagnosis also involves looking for an underlying cause of sensitive skin, which could be anything from a common allergy to acne, rosacea, eczema, seborrhoeic dermatitis or psoriasis. “The most common way to look for any underlying causes of sensitive skin is to do allergy testing, in the form of a patch test, blood tests or prick testing,” adds Dr Friedmann.

Treatment

Treatment will depend on whether an underlying condition is to blame for the sensitive skin symptoms.

If the problem is a result of mild eczema, seborrhoeic dermatitis or acne rosacea, see a dermatologist to have it treated. Hopefully this should permanently improve the problem. If the skin is simply sensitive, there are several steps you can take to improve the uncomfortable symptoms.

“Moisturise as often as possible, especially before going out in the wind and cold,” advises Dr Friedmann. “Avoid irritants, use soap substitutes and fragrance-free, hypoallergenic products.” For women in particular, it is worth experimenting with different makeup, beginning with the hypoallergenic ones. “Eventually you will find one which works for you. Remember however, that using makeup for many years can actually cause an allergy to develop! If you think that you may be allergic to your cosmetics, stick a little of the product on your inner wrist, put a plaster over it and see if you come up in an itchy rash after 48 hours. If you do – avoid!”

Clothes wise – natural, breathable fabrics such as cotton and wool are best to wear, as synthetic fabrics tend to cause more sweating and this can irritate the skin. It is also important to take good care of your general wellbeing, practicing a healthier diet and lifestyle. However, again, too much exercise will cause sweating which tends to make symptoms worse, so a bit of light exercise is better.

The alternating weather can also have a detrimental effect on your skin. In winter, skin tends to be drier due to the cold. This can exacerbate...
The products that I (and most dermatologists) recommend are simple fragrance-free moisturisers. There are two types:

- **Creams** such as Doublebase, Cetabren and Diprobase
- **Ointments** such as Vaseline, Hydromol and Epaderm

“I also recommend washing with Aqueous cream or Dermol in place of soap, as it is not an irritant. If an underlying condition such as acne, eczema, seborrhoeic dermatitis or psoriasis is diagnosed, specific treatments prescribed by your dermatologist can help.”

—Dr Adam Friedmann

5 top tips for sensitive skin from Harley Street Dermatologist, Dr Adam Friedmann:

1. **Moisturise** regularly to retain the skin's moisture.
2. **Avoid irritants** such as soap, wipes, fragrances etc. Wash with creams instead of soaps such as Aqueous cream or Dermol.
3. **Use high factor sun protection** as this generally stops photoaging.
4. **Get plenty of sleep and de-stress;** it is a known fact that stress and exhaustion lower the immune system and make most rashes worse.
5. **If the problems go on,** see a dermatologist who can diagnose and treat any underlying cause for sensitive skin such as allergy, acne rosacea, eczema, seborrhoeic dermatitis or psoriasis.