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SINGAPORE  
JANUARY 2014

# Men's Health

SINGAPORE'S NO. 1 MEN'S MAGAZINE

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## 18-DAY ABS!

ONE WORKOUT,  
RAPID RESULTS

CALORIE CRUSHER

BOOST YOUR  
METABOLISM  
IN 15 MINUTES!

### REV YOUR RECALL

NEVER FORGET WHERE  
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DON'T IGNORE  
THESE RUNNING  
HAZARDS P112

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SIGN UP  
NOW!  
P122

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LAW'S  
REGIME FOR  
A MOVIE-STAR  
PHYSIQUE  
P100

P110  
YOUR  
BEST  
BULK-UP  
MEAL

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## IDENTIFY YOUR ITCH



Does the itchy part have obvious signs like bumps and redness?

→ **[Yes]** You have **pruritoceptive itch**. "This is the most common type of itch," says Dr Lynn Chiam, dermatologist at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital. "The cause of the itch is either inflammation of the skin or skin damage." Overly drying conditions, fungal infections and eczema are some of the culprits for this type. Fortunately, the itch can be reduced, even eliminated, with medication. In the case of fungal infections, an antifungal cream is required on top of anti-itch medication.

→ **[No]** You might have **neurogenic itch**. "It results from disorders of the internal organs, such as liver disease, kidney failure, blood disorders and cancers," says Dr Chiam. "There might be no external signs of itching, since the itch is transmitted by our nerves."

• *A doctor might refer a person with this type of itch to a psychiatrist.*

Do you feel sad often, or have a pre-existing psychological condition?

→ **[Yes]** You might have **psychogenic itch**. "This is associated with psychological abnormalities like depression, anxiety and psychosis," says Dr Chiam. "People with this type typically have an excessive impulse to

scratch or pick at otherwise normal skin."

• *A doctor might refer a person with this type of itch to a psychiatrist.*

→ **[No]** You might have **neurogenic itch**. "It results from disorders of the internal organs, such as liver disease, kidney failure, blood disorders and cancers," says Dr Chiam. "There might be no external signs of itching, since the itch is transmitted by our nerves."

• *A doctor might refer someone with this type of itch for further medical examination, such as a blood test.*

Do you feel pain even without scratching the itch?

→ **[Yes]** You might have **neuropathic itch**. "Nerve damage can lead to this type of itch," says Dr Chiam. "The location of the affected nerves can be away from the actual itchy area," Dr Aw adds that this form of itching may indicate shingles or even hint at certain types of brain tumours.

• *Further medical investigation may be warranted. See your doctor.*

## ROUTES TO RELIEF



Is it a good time to pop over to the pharmacy?

→ **NO: USE MOISTURISER**



• **What it is** A hydrating cream or lotion.

• **Why take it?** If the cause of itching is dry skin, turn to the moisturiser (not water, which dries up your skin further when it evaporates). "Once the skin is made less dry, the itch will be alleviated," says Dr Aw. "For individuals with sensitive skin, take the preventive measure of applying a hydrating lotion regularly even when there's no rash." Moisturisers also help to decrease itching caused by inflammatory conditions, including eczema. "In most forms of this ailment, the skin barrier is defective. So when you repair that barrier with an externally applied moisturiser, the skin condition improves and the itch lessens, too," says Dr Chiam.

• **Use** Put it on after a bath. You'll need to first decide whether to opt for lotions or creams. "Lotions are more than 70 per cent water; creams such as Eucerin are around 50 per cent, and are more potent," says Dr Martin Steinhoff, professor of dermatology at the University of California at San Francisco. Certain moisturisers also contain additional anti-itch agents. "These special ones are only available at hospitals

and selected formularies and clinics," states Dr Chiam. To multiply the effect of using a moisturiser, put on wet pajamas after bathing and moisturising, adds Dr Steinhoff. "Then put dry pajamas on top. This can boost moisturiser absorption tenfold."

• **Side effects** No significant side effects in normal individuals.

→ **YES: OVER-THE-COUNTER REMEDIES**



→ **ANTIHISTAMINES**

• **What it is** A pill.

• **Why take it?** To counter excessive production of histamine. When cell damage is detected, our body releases this chemical substance that makes blood vessels more "leaky", allowing other cells and chemicals through to defend against the affected area, says Dr Chiam. "While this is a helpful response, excessive histamine production can lead to redness, swelling and itch." Allergies and mosquito bites are two major culprits of histamine-triggered itches. An outbreak of hives also calls for antihistamines, adds Dr Aw.

• **Use** Take a non-sedating one, such as loratadine, for daytime relief, and one that can cause drowsiness, such as diphenhydramine, for the night. "You'll scratch less and go to sleep more easily if

**"SCRATCHING ITCHY SKIN MAY ACTIVATE YOUR REWARD SYSTEM AND CULTIVATE A BAD HABIT. THE SENSATION OF PAIN COMPETES WITH THE ITCHING, AND PAIN CAN MEAN INJURY AND INFECTION."**





**“BEWARE OF USING TOO MUCH TOPICAL CORTICOSTEROIDS OR FOR TOO LONG. SIDE EFFECTS CAN INCLUDE THE THINNING OF SKIN.”**

you're slightly sedated,” says Dr Steinhoff.

- **Side effects** Antihistamines may rarely cause dry mouth, blurred vision and urine retention, says Dr Chiam. “These symptoms are not permanent and resolve when medication stops.”

result in the thinning of the skin, which can lead to the appearance of fine red blood vessels and easy bruising, warns Dr Aw. Users may also suffer from pimple outbreaks and excessive hair growth, says Dr Chiam.



#### → TOPICAL CORTICOSTEROIDS

- **What it is** A cream or lotion.

- **Why take it?** To reduce the pro-inflammatory activity of white blood cells caused by eczema, rashes, allergic reactions and poison ivy.

- **Use** An example of topical corticosteroids is hydrocortisone, available in cream or ointment form, says Dr Aw. For more severe itching, see a doctor for a stronger steroid. “Hydrocortisone is often too weak,” says Dr Steinhoff.

- **Side effects** When used excessively or for prolonged periods, hydrocortisone can



#### → OATMEAL BATHS

- **What it is** Colloidal oatmeal – pure oats ground into an extremely fine powder.

- **Why take it?** Oatmeal is packed with anti-inflammatory chemicals that soothe itchy skin.

- **Use** Don't pour your breakfast into the bath: Buy 100 per cent colloidal oatmeal from a skincare store, sprinkle about a tablespoon of the product under the tap (or into a basin) and soak for 15 to 20 minutes, recommend researchers in Iran. “Use water that's cool to the touch,” Dr Chiam adds.

- **Side effects** No significant side effects in normal individuals.

## ITCHY BALLS: SOLVED

Tracing the cause of itch in the pubes can be tough. It may be an allergic reaction, an infection or even a pinched nerve, says Dr Martin Steinhoff of the University of California at San Francisco. Here are four possible causes.



#### MOISTURE

If you haven't been keeping your pubes dry, and are an overweight individual with excessive skin folds, or wear underwear that's too tight, itch can result from perspiration and clogged sweat glands, says Dr Lynn Chiam of Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital. Switch to breathable fabrics that allow sweat to evaporate, and cleanse the pubic region promptly after athletic activities.



#### PIMPLES

These in the hairy areas of the crotch can lead to itch. “If there are pimples, see a doctor for an antifungal cream and wash,” Dr Chiam recommends.



#### FUNGUS OR INFLAMMATION

Lack of personal hygiene and sweat residues can lead to fungal infections, which would then require treatment with an over-the-counter fungal cream, says Dr Derrick Aw of NUH Dermatology Clinic. The itch may also be the result of a skin condition such as psoriasis or eczema.



#### LIVING PESTS

In the worst-case scenario, lice or scabies could be infesting your pubes. They, along with their oval-shaped eggs, may be clinging onto your hair shafts, describes Dr Aw. “Super-itchy red skin bumps may be a sign of scabies.” See your doctor immediately to avoid spreading the infestation to others.