

Chronic actinic dermatitis



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This guide has been written to help answer some of your questions about chronic actinic dermatitis.

You may have been given this guide because you have been diagnosed with chronic actinic dermatitis or because we think this might be the cause of your symptoms.

What is chronic actinic dermatitis?

Chronic actinic dermatitis (sometimes shortened to C.A.D.) is a skin complaint caused by sunlight or artificial light. The name is made up of three parts; *chronic* meaning the condition can last a long time; *actinic* which means sunlight is involved and *dermatitis* because the skin is inflamed with a type of eczema.

People with C.A.D. develop a rash on skin that is exposed to sunlight. The skin is red, inflamed, scaly, thickened and hardened. The rash can be very itchy. It can be very easy to bring out the rash with sometimes as little as a few minutes exposure to light setting it off. The rash is often there all year round, even on dull days. Some people can even develop the rash from light coming through windows or from artificial lights.

Many patients with C.A.D. also have a history of other types of dermatitis (or eczema) for example allergic contact dermatitis (especially allergies to plants such as chrysanthemums).

Who suffers from C.A.D.?

C.A.D. mostly affects older men although we do sometimes see younger patients with C.A.D.

Is C.A.D. infectious?

No. There is no risk of other people catching C.A.D. from you.

Does having C.A.D. increase your risk of cancer?

No. Experts do not think having C.A.D. increases your risk of cancer.

Can C.A.D. be cured?

No treatment will get rid of C.A.D. for ever, but, by careful sun avoidance and use of sunscreens, the rash can be kept at bay. When the rash occurs it can be treated with steroid creams or tablets. Occasionally C.A.D. can get better on its own, but for most people it is a lifelong condition.

How will having C.A.D. affect me?

If you have been diagnosed as having C.A.D. you may have to make changes to your lifestyle. You should try to:

- Avoid the sun between 11am and 3pm
- Wear protective clothing
- Consider fitting special ultra-violet blocking film to windows in your house and car
- Use a sunscreen that is SPF 30 or above (high UVB protection) and has four/five stars (high UVA protection). If you are visible light sensitive you may need special sunscreens. Remember to re-apply the sunscreen often
- Take care with house hold light bulbs making sure you always keep a good distance (at least 30cm) between yourself and the bulb

What about other artificial light sources?

Some patients with CAD need to be careful around bright artificial light sources.

- Take care with house hold light bulbs making sure you always keep a good distance (at least 30cm) between yourself and the bulb
- Avoid using single envelope compact fluorescent bulbs in the home
- The ultraviolet lights that some beauticians use when applying artificial fingernails may trigger your rash
- You should not use a sun bed if you have a sun allergy

What about vitamin D?

Importantly, in order for people to make enough Vitamin D themselves, they need a certain amount of sun exposure. The sun protection measures needed for people with C.A.D. mean Vitamin D deficiency is a real risk and this does require treatment with supplements if it occurs. This can be monitored through blood tests.

How can C.A.D. be treated?

Sunscreens

Your doctor will provide you with sunscreens on prescription and these will help protect your skin. Sunscreen should be applied as thickly as possible and re-applied as often as possible.

Skin creams

Your doctor may prescribe steroid creams or ointments to put on your skin. Steroid creams can be strong and should only be applied sparingly but when used carefully they can control the inflammation and help to ease the itch and tightness of your skin.

If you have a severe flare up of your rash you could use a strong steroid at first then as the rash eases you could switch to a lower strength one. Lower strength steroid creams are used on the face when necessary.

It is also important to apply moisturising creams or emollients. Emollients can help to combat the dryness of your skin. Emollients should be applied half an hour after the steroid creams.

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