Directions for Treating Scabies or “The Itch”

Your itching is caused by a very tiny parasite, a mite that is invisible to the naked eye. The female mite burrows into the uppermost layers of the skin, making a narrow tunnel in which she deposits eggs. These eggs hatch in a few weeks and the young mites migrate to the surface of the skin. After they breed, the males die. The young females move freely over the surface of the skin, ready to make new tunnels where they may lay more eggs, or move onto some other person who may be in close contact.

If you follow these directions carefully, you should be effectively treated. After two applications, nearly 100% of people are cured. Some itching may persist for a few weeks after treatment, but this comes from the drying effect of the bathing and medications. Occasionally a person might be re-exposed to scabies, and get an entirely new attack.

1. Apply permethrin 5 % cream to the entire skin surface, from the chin to toes (including under fingernails and toenails) and in skin folds. Use the medication liberally so that there is not a single place for the mite or egg to hide untreated.

2. Leave the medication on for 8 hours or overnight and then wash off with soap and water.

3. Apply steroid-free anti-itch lotion (Sarna or PrameGel) liberally to counteract the drying effect of the bathing and medications. Do not use topical or systemic corticosteroids while your scabies is being treated.

4. Put on clean clothes and put clean sheets and pillowcases on the bed.

5. It is a good idea to launder all clothes that have been worn and to launder sheets and pillow cases which might contain some of the mites. However, even if they have crawled off, they soon die anyway when they are away from the warm moist skin. It is not necessary to scrub or fumigate the house or furniture.

6. After 7 days, repeat all the above directions.

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Scabies is very contagious! All members of the household or close contacts must be treated at the same time. Family members need to see their own physicians for prescriptions. All close friends and relatives should also be treated, so that you don’t get re-infested.

NOTE: Permethrin (Elimite) is an insecticide and is safe to use as directed. Do not use this product after the two treatments recommended above. Remember, the itching can persist for 2-3 weeks after treatment, but additional treatments will not be needed.