

CENTER FOR DERMATOLOGY, COSMETIC AND LASER SUGERY, INC.

2557 Mowry Avenue, Ste 25
Fremont, Ca 94538
Phone: (510) 797- 4111
Fax: (510) 797-0122

995 Montague Expy, Ste 111
Milpitas, Ca 95035
Phone: (408) 957-7676
Fax: (408) 942-1342

Nummular Eczema

What is nummular eczema?

Nummular eczema is a type of itchy skin condition that appears as distinct coin-shaped patches on the skin of various parts of the body. Nummular eczema is a form of dermatitis, the technical term for any kind of skin condition marked by inflammation (e.g. redness, swelling, and often itching).

Nummular eczema most often fist appears in people between the ages of 55 and 65, and men seem to be more commonly affected than women. It can affect younger people, too, however.

What are the signs and symptoms, and where do they appear?

The signs that set nummular eczema apart from most other forms of dermatitis is the shape of the skin lesions. These are described as “discoïd”- in other words, dislike or coin-shaped patches most often appear on the back of the hands, legs, forearms, and buttocks, less frequently on the trunk, and rarely on the face.

Apart from these symptoms, the condition varies widely from person to person. For some, the lesions may be numerous and widespread. Others notice no more than a few scaly patches on their shins or upper arms. In very aggravated cases, the edges of the lesions may join and spread into large, inflamed patches.

What causes nummular eczema?

The exact cause of nummular eczema is unknown, but dryness, emotional stress, and bacterial infection are possible culprits. In any case, the condition appears to be more common in people with naturally dry, itch skin. For many people, nummular eczema is more bothersome in the winter months, when the skin tends to be drier than it is in the summer. Factors that seem to aggravate the condition include wool clothing, drying soaps, too frequent bathing, and certain topically applied medications, generics, certain oral medications such as cholesterol medications, water pills, etc.

What is the best treatment?

Treatment for nummular eczema consists of keeping the skin properly moisturized, avoiding aggravating factors, and applying topical medications (such as steroid creams) that can bring symptoms under control.

Your doctor can recommend a good emollient to apply regularly and especially after bathing to help your skin retain moisture and keep from drying out. Try to avoid drying soaps and excessive bathing; you may wish to switch to a more moisturizing, hypoallergenic brand of soap. Spend less than 5 minutes in the shower or take long soaking baths. Apply soap only to the scalp, face, under arms and private area or use _____ cleanser all over at the end of the shower and wipe it off with a wash cloth. The addition of soothing, moisturizing oils to bath water is often helpful. If you wear wool clothing, be sure it is lined so that it does not come in contact with your skin.

Your doctor may also prescribe treatment with a topical steroid cream or ointment, which should help bring relief from the itching and inflammation of nummular eczema lesions.

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In other cases, a coal tar preparation, a course of therapy with oral steroid medication, oral antibiotics, or the use of ultraviolet light may be necessary to reduce inflammation.