

# SELF

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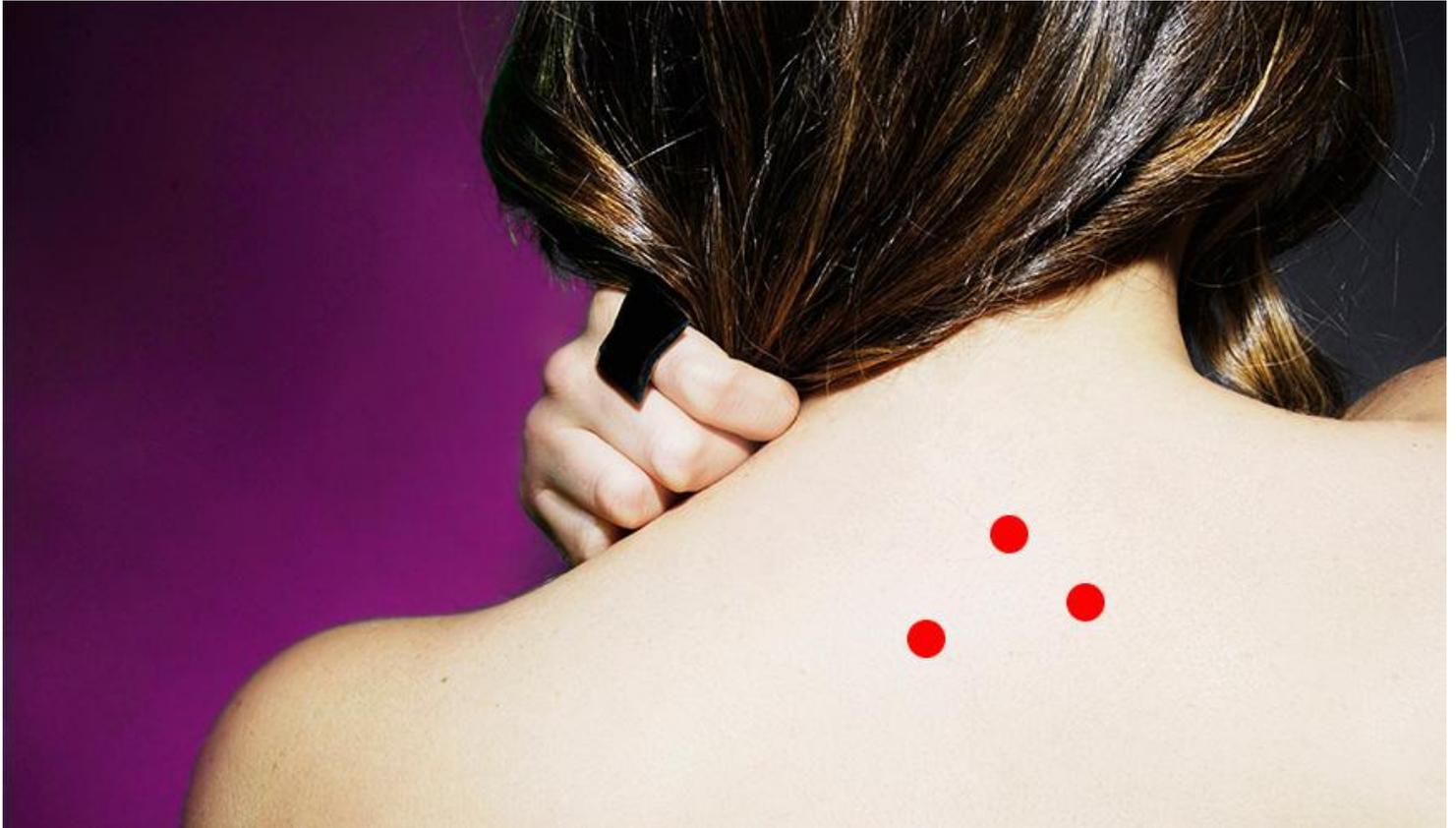
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WELLNESS

By Amy Marturana

## The 7 Most Common Causes Of Itchy Red Bumps

Here are the most likely causes of your irritating skin rash.



Regardless of your skin type, chances are you've had an itchy, red, bumpy rash at one time or another. It's like the international sign of skin irritation.

If it's not affecting your daily life or covering whole body, and you're not feeling sick otherwise, chances are it's nothing to worry about and will clear up on its own, Rebecca Kazin, M.D., dermatologist and associate director at the Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery, tells SELF. Treating it with over-the-counter hydrocortisone itch relief cream until it goes away may be sufficient. "But if it lasts for over two weeks, or goes away and comes back" or if your itch cream is not bringing you relief, it's a good idea to visit your dermatologist—you might need a stronger, more targeted medication to clear things up.

But, first consider whether these likely culprits might be the cause of your red, itchy, irritated (and irritating) skin.

## **1. Allergic reactions to personal care products (especially if you started using something new)**

This goes for cosmetics, skincare, haircare, and even your laundry detergent. We come into contact with so many potential allergens every day, that there are numerous possibilities for your skin to become irritated. “People tend to be allergic to preservatives, and some are more allergenic than others,” Kazin says. For example, many people are allergic to PABA, a chemical ingredient in sunscreens that absorbs UV rays, which is why many are now touted as PABA-free. It’s common for people to be allergic to certain fragrances, too. See if you can find a common thread in the products you use, and if it’s just one thing, stop using it. “But if it becomes more of an issue and you can’t figure out what’s causing it, you might need to get patch tested,” which is when an allergist introduces you to small amounts of common allergens to see which ones trigger a reaction.

## **2. Eczema**

Eczema is a general term that’s used to describe many different types of inflammation of the skin, or dermatitis, and can appear anywhere on the body, though it’s most commonly found in the elbow creases or behind the knees. The rash can look very different from person-to-person, but it’s usually intensely itchy, red, and dry.

## **3. Keratosis pilaris**

Also called chicken skin or KP, this common skin condition is a variant of eczema. It causes skin cells to cluster around hair follicles, trapping the hair underneath and causing a raised bump. KP typically shows up on the backs of the arms and thighs in large patches of rough, raised skin. It’s not always itchy, but it can be. Depending on the person’s skintone, these bumps are usually red or brown. It’s chronic, but can be managed with products that include chemical exfoliators like glycolic acid and lactic acid.

## **4. Rubbing from fabrics**

Wearing clothes that rub you in all the wrong places can cause itchy contact dermatitis. “Just that friction factor of the fabric” can be extremely irritating, Kazin says. It often happens if you’re working out and your clothes start to slide against your sweaty skin. If you notice an itchy red rash after hitting the gym, check if it falls where the seams of your athletic wear lies. Cotton is typically not irritating, but bulky, scratchy materials like wool are—especially around your neck.

## **5. Bug bites**

Bug bites typically show up as one or a few distinct red bumps, but many people can develop a generalized allergic reaction after getting bit by certain bugs. This is commonly seen with mosquito bites, and presents as a bumpy, itchy red rash around the area you were bit. If you wake up with itchy red bites you can’t explain, it could be a sign you have bed bugs. These bites typically appear on skin that’s exposed while you’re sleeping, like the arms, shoulders, neck, and face. They can also cause an itchy red rash in people who are sensitive. If you think you could have a tick bite, look for the telltale target-like appearance and see a doctor, as it could develop into Lyme disease. “You can treat normal bug bites on your own with hydrocortisone cream,” Kazin says, but if it looks infected or if it’s leaking pus, you should see a doctor.

## **6. Heat rash**

Heat rash causes itchy red bumps that may also feel prickly and tingle, and usually happens around the neck or other areas where sweat becomes trapped beneath clogged pores. “Heat rash can appear in different forms,” Kazin

says. “Sometimes it’s red bumps, but sometimes it’s tiny clear blisters.” The rash is common in hot, humid weather, and usually goes away on its own once the skin is cooled down.

## **7. Allergic reactions to food or medicine**

Eating a food or medicine you’re allergic to can cause you to break out in hives, an itchy red rash that appears as welts (very large bumps). The difference with this type of allergy is that the rash can appear anywhere on your body, versus a skin irritant that causes a rash right where it touched you. Since allergies to foods and medications can be extremely dangerous, it’s important to get checked out ASAP if you have hives or in some way can connect something you ingested to a rash.

## **8. Sun allergy**

The most common type is sun poisoning. “Sometimes people have been inside all winter and go into the sun and break out in an itchy red rash,” Kazin says. This is your body having a reaction to a sudden burst of sun exposure. It usually happens on the forearms or other places that have been covered for months and then all of a sudden see the sun. “It doesn’t happen to everybody, but some people have some sort of allergy to it,” Kazin explains.