Itchy Skin (Pruritus)

BCRenal
an **agency** of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Itchy skin is common in patients with and without kidney disease. The itchiness may be over certain areas (e.g., arm, leg, back, chest) or the whole body. Itchy skin can occur without visible changes on the skin or the skin may look red, dry or cracked and may have bumps, spots or blisters. Itchy skin is also known as pruritus (proo-RIE-tus).

Sometimes the itchiness lasts a long time and can be intense. It is often worse during the night. The more a person scratches, the itchier the area becomes. Breaking this itch-scratch cycle can be difficult, but continued scratching can damage skin or cause infection.

Itchy skin has several causes. It is often related to dry skin or allergies. Patients may also be itchy because of kidney disease.

Tips for Managing Itchy Skin

- Take lukewarm (not hot) water baths (if able) using as little soap as possible (e.g., underarms and groin area). Use fragrance-free sensitive skin bar soap (e.g., Dove sensitive skin bar soap).
- Avoid wearing rough clothing, such as wool, over itchy areas.
- Use mild detergent for your clothes and sheets and rinse well.
- Keep your fingernails short and clean.

Try not to scratch or rub the itchy areas.

- Apply cream* or baby oil to itchy areas up to three times a day. Apply moisturizing cream within 2 minutes of getting out of the bath/shower.
- Keep your house cool and humid, especially during the winter.
- Apply cold compresses to itchy areas.
- If you have tried these things and they are not working, talk to your doctor about other options, including medications and ultraviolet light treatments. Acupuncture may also help.

* Examples of creams (non-prescription):
- Cerave cream
- Cetaphil cream
- Lipikar Baume AP+ cream
- Aveeno cream
- Glaxal base cream
- Cliniderm soothing cream
- Aquaphor ointment
- Vaseline ointment