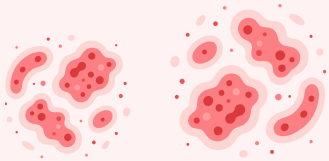
The Basics of Atopic Dermatitis and Chronic Urticaria

Atopic dermatitis (AD) and chronic urticaria (CU) are two skin conditions that are different, but the symptoms and treatment can sometimes overlap. Some people may have both conditions at the same time.

- Atopic dermatitis is a condition that causes dry, itchy, flaky, and/or painful patches on the skin. People with AD are more likely to develop asthma and food or environmental allergies.

- Chronic urticaria is a condition that causes raised hives (itchy welts) on the skin. The hives may be present in one or more areas of the body and can sometimes be severe. While some episodes of hives can be acute (temporary), sometimes they are chronic. This means that the hives are present for a long time.



How are AD and CU similar?

Itching: Both conditions can cause itching and irritation that can be severe and interrupt sleep and other activities.

Flare-ups: The symptoms of AD and CU can come and go and are sometimes unpredictable.

Triggers: Flare-ups can be triggered by different factors for different people. These can include things like stress, heat, exercise, exposure to water, sweat, or other substances, and more.

It is important to know that neither condition is contagious; you cannot spread them to anyone else.

How are AD and CU different?

1. Atopic Dermatitis

Appearance: The skin can develop dry, scaly, red or white patches. Sometimes they are flaky, scaly, or oozing.

Location: AD is often found in creases of the skin such as elbows, neck, wrists, and behind the knees. But it can also be present on other parts of the body.

Cause and Triggers: This is an inflammatory condition, which means the immune system overreacts to different triggers. It is also due to a breakdown of the skin's moisture barrier. But that doesn't mean that AD is "just dry skin." It is a condition that requires careful treatment that can include moisturizers but can also require other medications.

Treatment: There are many different treatment options for AD. Your symptoms will help your provider decide what treatment is best. Some options include moisturizing creams and ointments, steroids given by mouth or on the skin, antibiotics (medications that treat infections caused by bacteria), and biologics (medications that calm the parts of the immune system that cause flare-ups.)

2. Chronic Urticaria (Chronic Hives)

Appearance: The skin can develop smooth, raised welts that can be red, pink, or other colors depending on your skin tone. Some people also experience areas of swelling on their face or other parts of their body, called "angioedema."

Location: Hives can appear anywhere on the body and can sometimes move around, popping up in different places.

Cause and Triggers: We are still learning why CU occurs. It is not always an allergic reaction. CU can be triggered by many different factors like heat, cold, exercise, friction (rubbing), and exposure to allergens, water, sweat, and other substances.

Treatment: Like in AD, there are many treatment options for CU. Not every treatment works for every person. Some AD treatments, like biologics and steroids, can also help people living with CU. But CU may also require other treatments like antihistamines (medications that treat allergies and itching).

If you are experiencing symptoms of AD or CU, be sure to contact your healthcare provider. With their help, you can treat and monitor your symptoms, work to prevent flare-ups, and feel more in control of your skin health.