

Caring for Sensitive Skin

Q&A

An Interview with Dr. Peter Vignjevic, MD FRCPC DABD

By Dr. Rachel Zand,
PhD
Health Journalist



Dr. Peter Vignjevic, MD FRCPC DABD is a dermatologist practicing in Hamilton, Ontario, and an Assistant Clinical Professor at McMaster University Medical School. Dr. Vignjevic specializes in sensitive skin, eczema and cosmetic treatments. For more information on how to care for sensitive skin, please visit Dr. Vignjevic's website at www.doctorpeterderm.com.

Q: According to the American Dermatology Association, more than 40% of Americans suffer from "sensitive skin". What exactly is "sensitive" (or "intolerant") skin? How many Canadians suffer from this condition?

A: Sensitive skin is easily irritated by perfumes, preservatives, harsh fabrics (e.g. wool), cosmetic additives and other products that are widely found in skin care products. Sensitive skin is also often irritated by environmental factors such as sun, wind, and extremes of temperatures. More than 40% of Canadians have sensitive skin.

Q: What symptoms do people with sensitive skin have?

A: Common symptoms are itchy, red and dry skin. People with sensitive skin often note that their skin becomes easily inflamed or irritated from using cosmetics and moisturizers, or from sun, wind, harsh temperatures and harsh fabrics. They usually have a hard time finding cosmetic products that do not irritate their skin.

Q: What are the different sensitive skin profiles?

A: We can classify sensitive skin based on the cause of the sensitivity: genetic (inherited skin sensitivity), allergic (due to perfumes and preservatives found in products) and irritant (due to harsh chemicals such as soaps, cleansers, alcohols).

Q: At what point should a person with sensitive skin consult a doctor? How can a doctor help?

A: If a person has severe symptoms, including redness, burning, itching, flaking, scaling, crusting or intolerance to most cosmetics, a doctor should be consulted. A doctor can recommend a better skin care regimen using products suited to your skin.

Q: What should a person with sensitive skin look for and/or avoid when shopping for skin care products?

A: I recommend that people choose a high quality line of skin care products which contain minimal amounts of preservatives. If a person is very sensitive, she should use perfume-free products. "Perfume-free" is not the same as "fragrance-free", which simply means that other chemicals have been added to the product to mask the scent of the perfumes.

Q: Can you suggest a good skin care regimen for sensitive skin? Are there skin care products* specifically adapted for sensitive skin?

A: A good skin care regimen should include cleansing and moisturizing with gentle products that contain minimal amounts of preservatives. My favorite skin care line for the face is Toleriane (by La Roche-Posay). It contains high-quality cleansing and moisturizing ingredients, is gentle and cosmetically elegant. Toleriane moisturizer usually works well for normal to combination skin and Toleriane Riche for very dry skin. The eye make-up remover is also fragrance- and preservative-free.

For the body, I like using Lipikar cleansers and moisturizers because these are completely unscented. If the person is able to tolerate some perfume then she can use the Surgras body bar cleanser and the regular Lipikar moisturizer. Xerand is a good gently fragranced moisturizer for the hands.

Ultimately, if you have sensitive skin, talk to your pharmacist and your doctor. They will be able to review your current skin care regimen and make suggestions.

* NOTE: Dr. Vignjevic does not receive any funds from the manufacturers of products he recommends.

For more information on La Roche-Posay products, please visit www.LaRoche-Posay.com or call 1-888-LRP-LABO