

ERYTHEMA INTERTRIGO / ECZEMA INTERTRIGO /
INTERTRIGINOUS DERMATITIS

Intertrigo

CATEGORY:

Rashes

LOOKS LIKE:

Rash — may be red, white, purple, brown, or darker than the surrounding skin; sometimes cracked, swollen, or blistered (depending on the type)

FEELS LIKE:

Itchy; sore; sometimes dry, moist, bumpy, or scaly

OUTLOOK:

Treatable; can sometimes persist (chronic) or come back after treatment (recurrent)

LOCATION:

Areas where skin rubs together (eg, armpits, groin, neck folds, beneath breasts, under belly folds, behind the ears, or between fingers / toes)



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE —



Intertrigo under the breasts



Raw, red skin under the breasts due to fungal infection



Intertrigo in the armpits due to an allergic reaction to a deodorant



Intertrigo in the armpits due to erythrasma – a bacterial infection



Intertrigo in the armpits due to psoriasis



Intertrigo due to Hailey-Hailey disease (a genetic condition)

What is it?

Intertrigo is a rash that occurs in the skin folds (also called flexural areas), such as the armpits, groin, underneath the breasts, behind the ears, or between the fingers and toes. These areas can be prone to sweating, moisture build-up, chafing, irritation, and infection.

Intertrigo can affect anyone of any age. It is more common in hot, humid environments and in people who are overweight or obese or have diabetes.

There are a number of different causes of intertrigo. This affects the type of rash seen, how long it lasts, if it's contagious, and what kind of treatment is needed.

Intertrigo

CAUSES —

Intertrigo has a number of causes, including:

- **Infections** — bacterial, fungal or yeast
- **Inflammatory skin conditions** eg, atopic dermatitis (eczema), psoriasis — these often have a **genetic** component & can run in families
- **Skin irritation** — due to friction/chafing, sweat, incontinence (eg, nappy/diaper rash), or other substances
- **Allergic reactions** — eg, to deodorant.

SYMPTOMS —

Depending on the cause and type, intertrigo can look and feel different. It affects one or more body folds. Common symptoms include:

- Irritated, **sore, itchy** skin
- **Rash** — may appear red, white, purple, brown, or darker than the surrounding skin.

The affected skin may also be:

- Moist or dry
- Cracked (fissured), peeling, flaky, or scaly
- Thickened or swollen
- Blistered
- Pustular (pus-filled blisters).

Some types of infection (eg, pseudomonas) can also cause an odour/smell.

COMPLICATIONS —

- **Secondary infection** — even if not initially infected, intertrigo can become infected over time as it is easier for bacteria and fungi to get into irritated, moist skin.
- **Severe infection** — eg, abscesses or cellulitis may develop, and can sometimes spread elsewhere on the body. Seek urgent medical attention if you have a rash and a fever / are feeling unwell.

DIAGNOSIS —

Diagnosis begins with a healthcare professional asking some questions about your symptoms and health, and **assessing your skin**. They may check your temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure if there is concern for infection.

Swabs or **skin scrapings** may be done to test for infection. If you have unusual or severe symptoms, or if the intertrigo keeps coming back, other tests might be recommended, including:

- Blood tests eg, for diabetes
- Allergy tests eg, patch testing
- A biopsy (sample) of the affected skin.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION —

To try **keep skin folds clean, dry, and cool**:

- Shower after exercise to remove sweat
- Pat dry with a towel after showering
- Use a fan or hairdryer on a 'cool' setting to assist drying
- Wear loose, breathable clothing
- Use a gentle anti-perspirant in some areas eg, armpits or under breasts.

Reducing alcohol and smoking also helps to keep the skin healthy and reduce infections.

Further treatment depends on the cause of the intertrigo — for example:

- Incontinence or nappy/diaper rash — protective barrier cream (eg, zinc oxide)
- Bacterial infection — antibiotics
- Fungal infection — antifungals
- Inflammatory skin conditions such as psoriasis or eczema — steroid creams (or alternatives).

Occasionally, surgery can be helpful to reduce intertrigo eg, body contouring in people who have excess skin after weight loss.

OUTCOME —

Intertrigo can be a frustrating skin condition to deal with. Sometimes, it can be persistent (**chronic**) or come back again after clearing up (**recurrent**).

Fortunately, it is treatable and there are a range of treatment options available. Skincare strategies such as those described above can help reduce the risk of recurrence.



<https://dermnetnz.org/topics/intertrigo>