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Dermatology Corner: Managing Common Skin Problems at Home

Skin conditions—ranging from sudden rashes and flare-ups to minor infections—are highly visible and can cause significant discomfort. Knowing what to look for helps you determine whether a skin issue can be managed with at-home care, requires a virtual consultation, or needs immediate in-person attention.

What to Look For: Identifying Common Skin Issues

When assessing a skin change, look closely at the texture, color, and how quickly it is changing:

- **Localized Redness and Swelling (Potential Cellulitis):** A minor bacterial skin infection that presents as a red, warm, and swollen area. Crucial Step: Use a measuring tape from your [Home Diagnostic Kit](#) to outline the border with a pen. This allows you to track if the redness is spreading.
 - **Itchy, Flaky, or Dry Patches (Eczema/Dermatitis):** Often triggered by allergens, harsh soaps, or dry weather. The skin may look scaly, rough, or intensely inflamed.
 - **Clustered Blisters on One Side (Shingles):** A painful, burning rash that typically appears as a band or strip of blisters confined to one side of the face or body. This needs prescriptions medication treatments right away.
 - **Inflamed Bumps or Clogs (Acne):** Red, tender bumps, whiteheads, or deep nodules caused by excess oil and bacterial buildup in pores.
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Safe At-Home Treatments and Self-Care

For mild, non-spreading irritations, these home strategies can soothe the skin and promote healing:

Cool Compresses

- **Apply a clean, cloth dampened with cool water** to itchy or burning skin (such as eczema or a mild allergic rash) for 10–15 minutes several times a day. This constricts blood vessels and reduces intense itching.

Protective Skin Barriers

- **Moisturize Correctly:** For dry or eczematous skin, apply thick, fragrance-free creams or ointments (like petroleum jelly or ceramides) within three minutes of exiting a shower to lock in moisture.
- **Colloidal Oatmeal Baths:** Soaking in a warm (not hot) bath mixed with colloidal oatmeal can significantly calm widespread skin itching and hives.

Avoid Over-the-Counter Irritants

- **Avoid applying heavy fragrances, alcohol-based toners, or multi-ingredient "anti-itch" creams** containing benzocaine, which can trigger secondary allergic contact dermatitis. Stick to plain, bland options.
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Medications Commonly Prescribed by Providers

During a telehealth visit, if your condition requires medical-grade intervention, your prescribing clinician can prescribe targeted therapies:

Medication Type	Common Examples	What It Treats
Topical Corticosteroids	Hydrocortisone 2.5%, Triamcinolone	Reduces severe inflammation, swelling, and intense itching from eczema or allergic reactions.
Oral or Topical Antibiotics	Cephalexin, Clindamycin	Prescribed for bacterial skin infections like cellulitis or severe, inflamed acne.
Oral Antivirals	Acyclovir, Valacyclovir	Used to treat Shingles. Note: These are most effective when started within 72 hours of the rash appearing.
Topical Antifungals	Ketoconazole, Clotrimazole	Clears fungal overgrowth, such as ringworm or athlete's foot.

Note: Sometimes both a topical and oral medication are prescribed to address the skin condition from the outside in and the inside out. There are pros and cons to these treatment plans that must be discussed when your prescriber makes a recommendation.

The above information was reviewed and validated by David Campbell-O'Dell, DNP, APRN-IP, FNP-BC, FAANP