

A Look at Rosacea

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Rosy cheeks are often thought to be a sign of good health, youth and vitality. But, when cheeks become more red than usual, it may be the condition rosacea.

Rosacea is a common disorder affecting an estimated 16 million Americans, according to the National Rosacea Society. In most cases, the symptoms start with redness on the face – nose, cheeks, chin and forehead – resembling sunburn. The skin may be warm to the touch and sensitive. Over time, the redness may disappear and then reappear, lasting longer and being more noticeable.

As the disease progresses, the flare-ups may occur more often, blood vessels can become visible and red, pus-filled bumps may appear. In men, particularly, rosacea may appear as a thickening of the skin on the nose, which can lead to a bulbous, swollen appearance. With ocular rosacea, the eyes may become red, dry and itchy.

It's not known exactly what causes rosacea, but research suggests it may be a disorder of the immune, nervous or vascular systems. There is also evidence that a susceptibility to rosacea could be hereditary.

WHO CAN GET IT?

Whatever the underlying cause, there are groups of people more prone to rosacea than others and there are known triggers for the disorder.

While people of all races can get rosacea, it is more common in people with fair complexions. In general, women are more apt to get it than men, with an uptick seen in women who are premenopausal.



The exception is phymatous rosacea, the disorder that causes the nose to redden, coarsen and swell, which is most often seen in men. The condition most often hits people who are age 30 to 60, though it can be outside that range.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Rosacea is a chronic disorder, with symptoms that come and go, and one that can't be cured. But it can often be managed or sent into remission with lifestyle changes and medical treatment.

The first step may be by avoiding the triggers that cause an episode. Identifying triggers is a complex process, because factors that contribute to rosacea in one person may have no effect at all on another person. To help identify what your triggers might be, keep a diary of daily activities and flare-ups, then

look for patterns of food or behaviors that precede flare-ups.

Common triggers include the sun, stress and extreme temperatures. For example, shoveling snow in the cold then coming inside to a warm home can trigger rosacea. Hot/spicy foods, alcohol and caffeine are common triggers.

If you are prone to rosacea, avoiding triggers may not stop the recurrence of symptoms. When you get an outbreak, see your doctor. There are things he or she can do to help, including topical and oral antibiotics, topical agents that can reduce redness, and laser and light-based therapies for redness and dilated veins.

With a doctor's care and attention to lifestyle and environmental factors that may trigger your flare-ups, it is often possible to successfully manage rosacea. ●

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