

Pityriasis Rosea

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is pityriasis rosea?

Pityriasis rosea is scaly, reddish-pink skin rash. It is most common in children and young adults. A single scaly red spot may appear on your back or stomach. This is called a “herald patch.” Smaller spots will develop on your body, one to twenty days later. The rash may itch, but usually not badly. Most people with pityriasis rosea feel completely well otherwise. If the rash is on your back, it may be distributed in the shape of a Christmas tree. Though mostly on the trunk, it may also be found on the thighs, upper arms and neck. It usually avoids the face. Recurrences of pityriasis are rare.

What causes pityriasis rosea?

The cause of pityriasis rosea is uncertain. There is some evidence that pityriasis rosea may be triggered by a past viral infection. However, pityriasis rosea is not contagious, and people with this rash do not have to be kept away from other people.

What conditions look like pityriasis rosea?

The rash of pityriasis rosea can look like eczema, ringworm, psoriasis, or syphilis. If you are sexually active, you can discuss having a blood test for syphilis.

How long does pityriasis rosea last?

Pityriasis rosea usually lasts one to three months. It always disappears by itself. Let your provider know if the rash or itching lasts longer than three months.

How is pityriasis rosea treated?

The rash usually goes away on its own and does not leave a scar. There may be some temporary changes in pigment after it resolves. No treatment can cure it, but medicine can relieve your itching.

- Your provider might suggest antihistamine pills, a steroid cream, calamine lotion, or oatmeal baths.
- bathe or shower with plain lukewarm water as soap may irritate the skin
- put a thin coating of bath oil or unscented moisturizer on your freshly dried skin after a shower or bath to help moisturize the dry skin