

Dealing with itchy legs when running

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By Dr Brighton Chireka

I promised to walk my talk and start exercising. This other day I was running and enjoying it when suddenly I felt pain and itchiness in my legs . I tried to persevere but the sensation was so overwhelming that I had to stop to scratch my legs . I was annoyed as I was eager to continue with my exercise. What made the situation worse was that no matter how much I scratched my legs , the itchiness did not seem to go away.

I know many of us have experienced this problem of itchy legs. But thankfully for us , we can do something about itchy legs and prevent this awful situation from disturbing our exercise routine. The itchy legs does not only affect runners, it can also affect those that are doing intense cardio exercises.

Why do runners get itchy legs ?

If the skin is dry it will easily itchy when one tries to exercise especially running. Dry skin can be caused by "over showering " as too many showers can wash away some of the skin's natural oils that keep it moist . It is advisable to apply lotion before exercising . I have found this very useful and I now make it a habit to "cream" my legs with moisturising creams before I start my workout.

Dehydration makes the skin dry and causes itchiness when we try to run. Cold weather usually has less humidity, which means we get exposed to dry air. We get dehydrated in winter because of the dry air . As we breathe we also lose our moisture so we need to drink enough. The challenge is that in winter we do not feel like drinking. Failure to replenish fluids in winter leaves us dehydrated which contributes to dry skin.

Lack of fitness can initially be the cause of itchy legs when one tries to go back to exercising. If one has been inactive for sometime , the blood vessels does expand on exercising. This expanding of the blood vessels causes a sensation that is perceived by our brain as itchiness. The good thing is that if one can work through the discomfort , the itchy legs should get better and eventually disappear.

The itchy legs can be due to the type of sports gear one may be wearing . The sweating caused by exercising can make the reaction worse and cause severe itching. It may be worth changing the sports wear and see if that helps . Sometimes workout gear made with moisture-wicking fabrics is the best as it minimises the amount of sweat that sticks to the skin during exercising.

In conclusion let me say this;

There are plenty of steps that we can take to prevent itchy legs . The following are some of the steps that I would recommend to everyone who may be suffering from itchy legs each time they try to run;

- make sure that you are well hydrated by drinking enough fluids preferably water
- Use moisturising lotions after showering and before exercising.
- For women you may need to shave your legs even in winter .
- If you have been inactive for sometime , it's best to keep on exercising to allow the body to adapt .
- Consider changing your laundry detergents or your sport attire if the above does not help.

Exercise induced urticaria

In rare cases some people do get what is called exercise induced urticaria. This is characterised by hives and severe itchiness . This can go away on its own after a few work out sessions but in some people it does not go away . In these cases I suggest you visit your doctor urgently as you may need medication to stop the itchiness and swelling .

I look forward to hearing from you about your experiences with itchy legs when running . Kindly leave me any tips that you have used to get rid of the itchiness.

This article was compiled by **Dr Brighton Chireka**, who is a GP and a blogger based in Kent in the United Kingdom. Feel free to contact him at info@docbeecee.co.uk and you can read more of his work on his blog at [DR CHIREKA'S BLOG](#)

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