



Rosacea

What is Rosacea?

Rosacea (pronounced roh-ZAY-sha) is a common rash, found on the central part of the face, usually of a middle-aged person. A tendency to flush easily is followed by persistent redness on the cheeks, chin, forehead and nose, and by crops of small inflamed red bumps and pus spots. It is a different condition to the more common Acne vulgaris and the two are often confused. Rosacea is much less well diagnosed than acne vulgaris, a frequent misconception being that the red face of Rosacea sufferers is mistaken for acne or due to a "healthy" outdoor complexion or worse. What is less frequently observed is the mental stress and anxiety that can accompany Rosacea. In recent surveys by the National Rosacea Society, more than 76 percent of rosacea patients said their condition had lowered their self-confidence and self-esteem, and 52 percent reported it had caused them to avoid public contact or cancel social engagements.

What are the symptoms?

The face becomes flushed and red and typically feels itchy and burning. Small white and yellow pimples may appear, which sometimes become pustules. In some cases the rash becomes permanent, leaving the skin red. When the nose is affected, particularly in older men, the skin becomes thickened, swollen and purple, a condition called rhinophyma. The skin of the face feels sensitive, and can burn or sting. Flushing (the face becomes bright red) adds to the embarrassment caused by the rash. Be sure to consult your doctor if you have problems with your eyes.

Who's affected?

Up to one in ten people may have rosacea. Although it can appear for the first time at any age, it more commonly appears between the ages of 30 and 55, with women more often affected than men. It can run in families.

What causes rosacea?

The cause of rosacea is not fully understood, but many think that the defect lies in the blood vessels in the skin of the face, which dilate too easily. Rosacea is more common in women than in men, and in those with a fair skin who flush easily. Many things seem to make rosacea worse, but probably do not cause it in the first place. They include alcohol, too much exercise, both high and low temperatures, hot spicy foods, stress, and sunlight. Things that stir up one person's rosacea may well have no effect at all on the rosacea of someone else. The idea that rosacea is due to germs in the skin, or in the bowel, has not been proved. Rosacea is not catching.

What does rosacea look like?

Rosacea starts with a tendency to blush and flush easily. After a while, the central areas of the face become a deeper shade of red and end up staying this colour all the time. The area becomes studded with small red bumps (papules) and pus spots, which come and go in crops. Small dilated blood vessels (telangiectasia) appear, looking like thin red streaks. Scarring is seldom a problem.

Other problems with rosacea include the following:

- Rosacea can lead to embarrassment, anxiety, or depression, and a disrupted social life.
- The face may swell (lymphoedema), especially around the eyes.
- The nose may grow big, red and bulbous (rhinophyma) due to the overgrowth of the sebaceous glands. This is more common in men than women.
- Some people with rosacea have eye symptoms (red, itchy, sore eyes and eyelids; a gritty feeling; sensitivity to light). A few patients with rosacea have more serious eye problems, such as rosacea keratitis, that can interfere with vision.

What is the treatment?

It isn't possible to prevent a first attack, but those affected can learn to avoid common triggers. These include hot food and drink, alcohol, spicy foods, caffeine, temperature changes, exposure to the sun or wind and stress. When flare-ups occur they can be successfully treated with topical antibiotics. Other treatments may be necessary for more severe causes of rosacea, and surgery or laser treatment can be used to treat rhinophyma. No treatment can be guaranteed

to switch rosacea off forever. However long-term treatments control symptoms and can clear the spots. Treatment works best if started when rosacea is at an early stage. Although it's difficult to predict how long rosacea will last, in time it does disappear.

What can you do?

Unfortunately there is no cure for rosacea, but it can usually be effectively controlled if you are aware of several external influences that may aggravate the skin.

- Protect your skin from the sun by using a sun block on your face every day (at least SPF15) even on shady days.
- Do not rub or scrub your face as this can make rosacea worse.
- Consider the lifestyle factors that can stir up rosacea (listed above). Learn which worsen your rosacea and avoid them. A written record of your flare-ups may help here.
- Cosmetics can often cover up rosacea effectively. Certain skin care products - Avoid using wrinkle creams, cleansers containing alcohol, exfoliating/abrasive cleansers.
- If your eyes are giving problems, do not ignore these - consult your doctor.
- Temperature extremes - Heat is a major cause of flare ups, so avoid hot baths and showers, dress in cool, lightweight clothing (avoid woollens completely).
- Hot drinks - Tea and coffee particularly, but any hot drink bring on flushing.
- Spicy foods - Avoid Chillies, curries, pickles, mustard and horseradish.
- Alcohol - Even a few sips can affect some people.

Disclaimer

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Other helpful information sites

www.bbc.co.uk/health - information website

www.nhs.uk

www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk - helpful advise on many different types of skin problems

