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Is It Menopause or Is It Me: Itchy Everything

Declining estrogen can wreak havoc—dryness, inflammation, itchiness, etc.—even on once flawless skin. A dermatologist explains how to calm it down.

By Lisa Arbetter Published: Jan 07, 2026 10:11 AM EST

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Sure, we know that menopause is behind night sweats and hot flashes, but is it to blame for everything that goes awry when you're over a certain age? In this new series, we're unpacking some of the funkiest health woes people can encounter in midlife to see which can be chalked up to The Change, and which are...well, just a you thing.

You're standing in line at the grocery store when it hits: the overwhelming need to scratch your right nipple (or your inner ear, or the back of your knee). You try to be discreet—adjust your shirt or cross your arms—but scratching brings no relief. What gives?

From the same hormonal chaos that brought you [Hot Flash](#) and [The Mood Swinger](#) comes the next villain in the Menopausal Cinematic Universe: The Wicked Itch.

"Itching and dryness are thought to begin in perimenopause as estrogen fluctuates and then may persist into menopause and postmenopause, when estrogen remains low," says dermatologist [Shoshana Marmon, MD, PhD](#), an assistant professor at New York Medical College.

The Big Itch, Explained

Estrogen helps maintain skin hydration and supports the production of collagen and elastin. As it drops, so does your skin's ability to protect itself. With less collagen—the protein that gives skin its structure—your skin becomes thinner, drier, and far more vulnerable.

"The weakened barrier allows irritants to penetrate and moisture to escape, increasing susceptibility to itch," explains Dr. Marmon, who also chairs the American Academy of Dermatology's Menopause and Women's Health in Dermatology Quality Improvement Committee. In other words, your skin is suddenly less like armor and more like a screen door.

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The effect isn't uniform across your body. Some spots, like nipples and genital skin, itch because they're packed with estrogen receptors and react more dramatically to hormone loss. Others, like armpits and feet, itch for less glamorous reasons: friction and sweat.

And yes, it can get worse at night. Tossing and turning in bed without the normal distractions of your waking hours, plus natural shifts in body temperature and cortisol as your body prepares for sleep, can make sensations feel stronger. The sleep disruption and night sweats that come with perimenopause may also heighten awareness of itch, says Dr. Marmon.

How to Save Your Skin

First, talk to a dermatologist to rule out other itch-inducing skin issues like eczema or contact dermatitis, or something more serious like thyroid or liver disease. One clue: Hormonal itching tends to present with generalized dryness and itch but no distinct rash, says Dr. Marmon.

Then restore your skin's defenses. "Use gentle, soap-free cleansers, limit bathing time, and avoid very hot water," Dr. Marmon recommends. Moisturize still-damp skin with a cream or ointment containing "ceramides, glycerin, or hyaluronic acid and gentle emollients; colloidal oatmeal can also soothe itch."

You'll also want to hydrate inside and out. Lugging a giant Stanley around all day may feel ridiculous, but your skin will thank you. A humidifier can make a big difference, as can cutting back on caffeine and alcohol.

Lastly, choose soft, breathable fabrics like cotton, and—as impossible as it sounds—try not to scratch that itch.

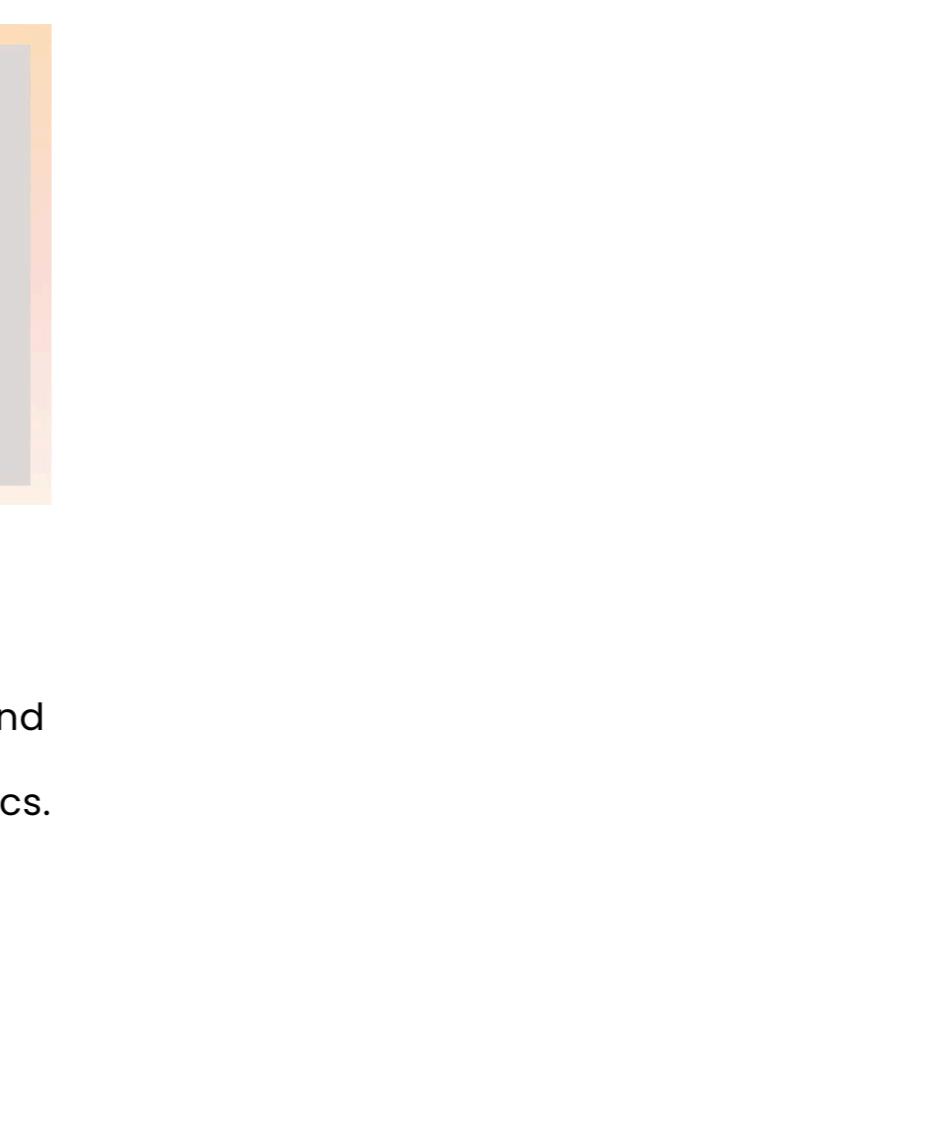
If these steps still don't cut it, a dermatologist may recommend a low-dose topical corticosteroid or even hormone therapy (HT). "Some studies suggest that hormone therapy combining estrogen and progesterone can enhance skin hydration, thickness, and barrier function, which may help reduce itching," says Dr. Marmon. "However, larger, well-controlled trials are still needed to confirm its effectiveness specifically for relief of itching."

Even without HT, some women see their skin stabilize a few years after menopause, especially if they stay consistent with moisturizing and gentle care. But for others, The Wicked Itch never entirely goes away. Luckily, you know her origin story—and that gives you the power to keep her evil in check.

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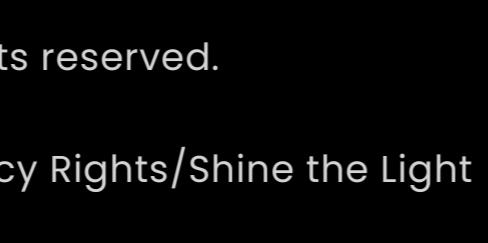


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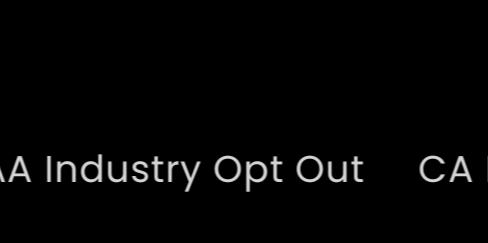
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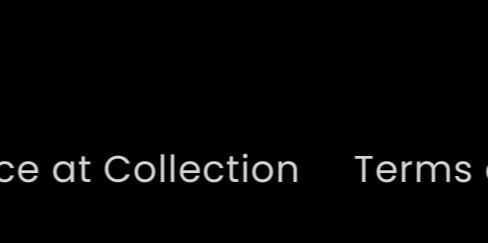
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