

Nickel Allergy • Patient Information

Nickel allergy is a very common form of Allergic Contact Dermatitis (ACD). A rash develops after contact with nickel and may have the following characteristic(s): redness, itching, swelling, hives, and/or cracks in the skin.

Nickel allergy

Piercing is a major cause of nickel allergy. When the skin is injured, prolonged contact with nickel causes an allergic reaction. Nickel salts from the jewelry penetrate the skin and cause the sensitization. Once an individual is sensitized to nickel, symptoms will appear after contact with nickel.

Nickel allergy is considered a delayed Type IV allergy meaning an allergic reaction may occur up to 48 hours after nickel contact.

Allergy relief

For immediate relief, your doctor may recommend a steroid cream to help reduce inflammation and redness. Nickel allergy usually clears within a few days once contact with nickel is stopped. It is important to identify the source of nickel and avoid it.

How to avoid nickel

The key to avoiding nickel is to identify it BEFORE your skin does.

All metal items suspected of containing nickel may be tested with a dimethylglyoxime test called Nickel Alert™. Nickel Alert quickly, safely, and easily tests jewelry and other metal items for the presence of nickel.

Where nickel is found

Nickel is found in metal and metal plated objects, including gold, because it is inexpensive, durable, and lustrous.

Often it is difficult to identify the nickel source because a rash might not appear for two days. It is critical to test all metal items since there are often multiple sources of exposure.



Common items that may contain nickel

- Belts and buckles
- Earrings and rings
- Necklaces and bracelets
- Costume/heirloom jewelry
- Buttons and snaps
- White and yellow gold
- Zippers and fasteners
- Hand tools and scissors
- Keys and coins
- Eyeglass frames
- Watches and bands
- Brass or chrome fixtures
- Kitchen utensils
- Silverware
- Bra hooks
- Suspender clips
- Hair pins
- Handbag clutches
- Jean studs
- Pocket knives
- Pens
- Lipstick holders
- Powder compacts
- Cell phones

Nickel free and hypoallergenic jewelry

Jewelry labeled "nickel free" or "hypoallergenic" often refers only to the plating. The base metal may contain nickel. Once the plating wears thin, even microscopically, nickel salts will come in contact with your skin and symptoms can occur.

Expensive jewelry may also contain nickel in the base metal. Test your jewelry regularly, even the "safe" items, using the dimethylglyoxime test—Nickel Alert.

Metals that often contain nickel

- Gold – yellow and white
- Silver, sterling silver, silver plate
- Palladium
- Chrome (or chromate)

Suitable replacements for nickel

- Titanium
- Platinum
- Plastic
- Wood

Because many goods are manufactured in developing countries, it is recommended you test even "safe" metals occasionally, especially if symptoms arise.

When avoidance of nickel is not possible

Avoiding nickel is ideal, but not always possible. When avoidance of nickel is not possible, coat the metal that contacts your skin (jean studs, eyeglass frames, etc.) with a clear coating. Avoid generic nail polishes; they often contain toluene, formaldehyde, and dibutyl phthalate which can lead to further sensitization for nickel allergic individuals. Use Nickel Guard™ as a safe alternative. For large areas of skin exposed to a nickel source, consider wearing protective clothing.



Additional considerations

Weather: In summer, perspiration aids the transfer of nickel salts to the skin, increasing symptoms.

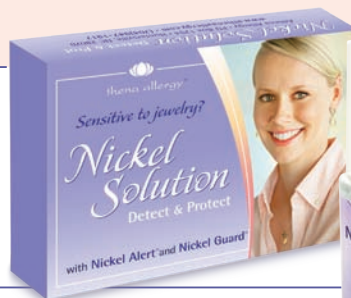
Diet: Severely allergic individuals may choose to avoid foods which are rich in nickel. Dietary intake of some foods has been shown to aggravate dermatitis, especially hand dermatitis. Your doctor may instruct you to avoid some foods which typically contain higher amounts of nickel, including asparagus, chocolate, peanuts, beans, peas, rhubarb, cabbage, oysters, spinach, herring, tea, mushrooms, whole meal flour, pears, sprouts, corn, raisins, onions, tomatoes, and baking powder.

Medical: Tell your physician that you are nickel allergic. Verify all dental appliances and surgical implants are nickel free prior to implantation.



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