

Your quick guide to: Nickel Allergy

Nickel allergy commonly develops following ear piercing and the use of metal jewellery. European Union legislation currently limits the amount of nickel released from metals in prolonged contact with the skin and it is hoped that the allergy may become less common in the future. The allergy results in the development of a localized eczema/dermatitis.

Pure gold (18 carat or more), solid silver and platinum are usually safe alternatives for jewellery. Other metal objects in prolonged contact with the skin such as jeans studs, watches, buckles, clips in underwear, spectacle frames and mobile phones can also cause dermatitis.

Items in transient contact with the skin such as kitchen utensils, door handles etc. are much less likely to cause reactions as are items made from stainless steel. Metallic items that are difficult to avoid contact with such as watches and jeans studs can be coated with nail polish although the dermatitis recurs as the polish wears off. Ideally find a nickel free alternative.

Nickel allergy is more common in people with hand dermatitis although the reason for this is not always clear. If you regularly handle money, this may contribute as coins release nickel and exposure to nickel builds up with repeated contact.

Orthopaedic pins and plates may result in eczema affecting the overlying skin. The role of nickel in joint replacements is unclear, although typically if there is concern, a titanium prosthesis can be used. It is uncertain whether nickel in the diet is important, although it is unlikely to be a problem in the majority of nickel allergic individuals. A spot test that detects the presence of nickel in metals is available which uses the chemical dimethylglyoxime.

Key facts:

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Clinical contributions:

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Additional Resources / References

Eczema (Atopic Dermatitis)

<https://www.allergyuk.org/types-of-allergies/eczema/>

Skin Allergy Resources

<https://www.allergyuk.org/allergyuk-resources/?conditions=80>

Allergy UK Helpline

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