PITYRIASIS ROSEA

WHAT IS IT?
Pityriasis rosea is a common, self-limiting skin condition of unknown origin. There is some evidence that it is caused by a virus. About 20% of those diagnosed with pityriasis rosea have had a recent viral infection, usually a cold.

HOW COMMON IS IT?
Pityriasis rosea is most prevalent in people between the ages of 10 and 35. It is slightly more common in women than men.

IS IT CONTAGIOUS?
No one knows for sure. However, isolation is not necessary.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?
Classically, the first sign of pityriasis rosea is the appearance of a skin lesion known as a “herald patch”.
- This lesion is round to oval and usually 2-5cm in diameter.
- It often looks like ringworm, with a scaly border.
- It can appear anywhere on the body, most often on the chest, neck, or back.

Smaller oval lesions appear a few days to 2 weeks later. They typically reach their maximum number in 1-2 weeks.
- They are usually found in crops on the trunk, upper arms, and thighs (rarely on the face).
- They are salmon pink in color on Caucasians and darker colored on people of African or Asian descent.
- Like the larger “herald patch”, the smaller patches often have a scaly border.
- These lesions typically follow the skin lines and can resemble a Christmas tree pattern, which is more noticeable on the back, chest, or abdomen.

About half of people with pityriasis rosea experience itching, especially if they are overheated.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?
No real treatment is necessary for pityriasis rosea. The rash will clear on its own within 1 to 3 months. Only a very small percentage (<2%) of people experience a recurrence.

If itching is significant, the following treatments can be helpful:
- **An antihistamine**, such as Zyrtec, Allegra, Claritin, or Benadryl. Sedation is common with Benadryl and may occur in some patients taking Zyrtec.
- **Over-the-counter anti-itch lotions** containing pramoxine or menthol, such as Sarna.
- **A corticosteroid cream** used in a thin layer twice daily for up to 2-3 weeks. Avoid overuse since it can lead to thinning of the skin and stretch marks.
- **Avoiding excess soap and hot water**, as they can dry out the skin and increase itching.
- **Frequent moisturizer use**, especially after bathing (within 3 minutes of drying the skin) to trap moisture in your skin.

Contact your healthcare provider if any of the oval patches become infected. Signs of infection include fever, increased redness, tenderness, swelling, drainage, or red streaking on the skin.