



# Clothing for people with sensitive skin

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DLF Factsheet

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# Contents

## Clothing for people with sensitive skin

CLOTHING	4
FABRICS	4
STYLE OF CLOTHING	4
WEIGHT OF FABRICS	4
PERSPIRATION	5
FEEL OF FABRICS	5
FOOTWEAR	5
SOCKS, STOCKINGS AND TIGHTS	6
USEFUL ORGANISATIONS	6

## **CLOTHING**

Care should be taken when selecting clothing for people who have skin problems. These problems may be due to poor circulation, reduced sensation, allergies, or conditions such as eczema and psoriasis. The aim is to ensure comfort and reduce the risk of skin damage. Washing powder may be the cause of skin sensitivity, and you should try to find out which brands cause a skin reaction.

## **FABRICS**

Although the needs of each person will be different depending on the cause of his/her sensitivity, most people prefer the fabric worn next to the skin to be smooth and soft. Natural fibres such as fine cotton and silk will feel comfortable against the skin but some wools and linens may be rough and itchy. Manufacturers of man-made fibres are constantly working to improve the comfort and feel of cloth made from their products to match fabric containing the best of natural fibres.

Stiff fabrics that do not 'give' are uncomfortable especially if the wearer has to sit for long periods of time.

## **COTTON**

Cotton and silk are the two best natural fabrics for sensitive skins. Cotton is absorbent and cool; silk is more expensive than cotton but is warmer. Some clothing is now made of only unbleached, organic cotton.

## **SILK**

Silk retains body heat efficiently, is strong, light, flexible and hard wearing and has a natural wicking action drawing body moisture away from the skin. Silk clothing can be found in some retail and specialist sports shops and specialist mail order catalogues.

## **VISCOSE**

Viscose is now being used extensively and is a natural product. Linen and hemp are also being used although they will tend to be heavier. Wearers will need to find out which, if any, chemicals are employed in their manufacture.

## **STYLE OF CLOTHING**

For those with skin problems, clothing should be loose fitting.

Try to avoid creases and folds in the material as they can increase the risk of skin breakdown. Rigid seams in jeans, fasteners, pockets and accessories should be avoided at the points where pressure is increased.

## **WEIGHT OF FABRICS**

The weight of fabric used in clothing can be important when movement causes pain and when strength and endurance are diminished. In these circumstances heavy clothes make dressing painful and exhausting, and generally restrict freedom of movement. Lightweight garments, such as quilted coats and anoraks, are warm and comfortable.

Thin layers and an unlined wind-resistant cotton anorak worn on top of a cardigan would be as warm and more comfortable than a heavy coat.

Garments in Man-made fibres are often lighter in weight than their equivalent in wool.

## **PERSPIRATION**

When body temperature regulation is unstable and leads to excess perspiration, fabrics made from fibres, such as cotton, linen, viscose or lyocell, or blends containing these, worn next to the skin will absorb perspiration and allow it to escape through the outer clothing. In very hot weather it is best to wear loose fitting, loosely knitted absorbent fabrics next to the skin allowing air to circulate and remove moisture and heat from the body. If the humidity is high and the air still, so that little evaporation takes place, almost any clothing will be uncomfortable.

## **FEEL OF FABRICS**

The feel of fabric is an important part of the comfort that clothing can give.

Natural fibres are generally believed to have the most pleasant feel against the skin but modern processing can give Man-made fibres a natural feel while some wools, usually considered soft, can be hard and scratchy, causing itching; linen also may have a rough texture.

The sensation of cold that is

momentarily experienced when a garment with a smooth woven fabric, such as a lining, is put on is not felt with textured or pile fabrics. People with certain skin complaints and those who have extensive scar tissue following burns or operations must avoid irritating their skin; covering the area with silk or smooth fine cotton may be more comfortable than wearing wool or nylon fabrics.

People with asthma and chest complaints often need to avoid fabrics with a loose, fluffy pile as these can increase their breathing difficulties.

## **FOOTWEAR**

Adverse reactions to leather footwear are usually caused by either chrome used in the tanning process or by dyes. Over recent years, other ways of tanning leather have been found so that it is now a little easier to find shoes which are less likely to produce such reactions.

When a reaction has been noted, the wearer should find out what has caused it by having allergy tests. Once the cause is known, leathers which have been tanned in different ways must be found. Always check the composition of shoe linings too.

Fabric shoes are available particularly for summer wear; and trainers - especially the cheaper ranges - often have fabric uppers. Fabric slippers are available all year round but always check the fibre content of the fabric used and slippers don't offer

adequate support for walking outside the home.

Sometimes minor allergic problems are avoided by buying shoes lined with cotton, or by wearing cotton socks, stockings or tights.

Wellington boots are a problem for people with an allergy to rubber. Some are lined with cotton. Breathable Wellington boots are also available from specialist suppliers - contact your nearest clothing advice service for details.

Soles and insoles are made from many different materials and this should be indicated on the shoe when purchasing, so it should not be too difficult to find out which to choose and which to avoid.

## **SOCKS, STOCKINGS AND TIGHTS**

Today most socks, stockings and tights include some Lycra to make them fit closely and this may cause problems for certain people. Support and elastic hose contain variable amounts of Lycra according to the amount of support required.

Stockings and socks with elasticated tops will restrict circulation if too tight, as will hosiery which is too small. Socks are now available with non-elasticated tops.

Socks that are very loose will wrinkle and could give rise to pressure.

Patterns and deep ribbing and seams around toe and heel on the socks will also cause uneven pressure and could lead to sores on the skin.

Uneven pressure can also be a problem with tube/sports socks, as the lack of shaping leaves excess fabric in folds at the front of the ankle.

Contact the diabetes association for advice on socks and footwear to avoid broken skin.

## **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS**

National Eczema Society  
Hill House  
Highgate Hill  
London NW19 5NA  
Tel: 0870 241 3604  
Fax: 020 7281 6395  
Email: [helpline@eczema.org](mailto:helpline@eczema.org)  
Website: [www.eczema.org](http://www.eczema.org)  
Produces a list of 100% cotton goods stockists.

Diabetes UK  
10 Parkway  
London NW1 7AA  
Tel: (020) 7424 1000  
Fax: (020) 7424 1001  
Helpline: (0845) 120 2960  
Email: [bda@diabetes.org.uk](mailto:bda@diabetes.org.uk)  
Website: [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)

### **Advice and information services**

Contact Assist UK to find your nearest centre for information about specialist suppliers.  
[www.assist-uk.org.uk](http://www.assist-uk.org.uk)

Clothing Advice and Information Service  
The Independent Living Centre  
Isca House,  
Haven Road,  
Exeter EX2 8DS  
Tel: 013392 687 276  
Website: [www.devon.gov.uk/ilc](http://www.devon.gov.uk/ilc)  
Contact: Philippa Greenslade

Style Centre  
Disabled Living  
Redbank House,  
4 St Chads Street,  
Manchester  
Tel: 0161 214 5959

Posture Independence and Mobility  
Service  
Oxford Centre For Enablement  
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre  
Windmill Road  
Headington  
Oxford OX3 7LD  
Tel: 01865 227 600  
Contact: by referral from any local health  
care professional.

### **Clothing workshops/ dressmakers**

Clothing Solutions (for disabled people)  
Unit 1 Jubilee Mills  
30 North Street  
Bradford  
BD1 4EW  
Tel and Fax 01274 746 739  
Email  
[enquiries@clothingsolutions.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@clothingsolutions.org.uk)  
Web: [www.clothingsolutions.org.uk](http://www.clothingsolutions.org.uk)  
Contact: Sandra Hunt

Bassetlaw Fashion Services  
Unit 7 Canalside Workshops  
Leverton Road  
Retford  
Nottingham DN22 ODR  
Tel: 01777 860 206  
Contact: Barbara Ackley

Special Occasions Clothes  
27 Donald Road  
London E13 0QF  
Tel: 020 8470 4868  
Contact: Cryn Horn

**We would like to thank the Clothing  
Advice Service at the Independent  
Living Centre in Exeter for assistance in  
updating these factsheets.**

# Donation Form

We hope this factsheet has proven useful to you. If you would like to help the DLF continue to provide valuable information such as this, you may wish to consider making a small donation towards our work. As a charity, we rely on the generosity of the public to help us continue to help older and disabled people lead independent lives.

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If you would like to make a credit card donation, please call our Fundraising Department on **020 7289 6111 (ext: 254)**, or alternatively visit our website at **www.dlf.org.uk**

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NB: You must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations in the tax year (currently 28p for every £1 you give)

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380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU**

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