

# Dermatology

AN ILLUSTRATED COLOUR TEXT

EIGHTH  
EDITION

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Eighth Edition

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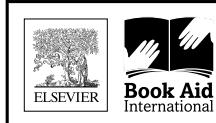
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# Contents

## 1 Basic principles 1

1 Microanatomy of the skin 2	7 Terminology of skin lesions 16	13 Basics of medical therapy—systemic medication, other treatments, monitoring and scoring systems 30
2 Derivatives of the skin 4	8 Taking a history 18	14 Epidemiology of skin disease 32
3 Physiology of the skin 6	9 Examining the skin 20	15 Body image, the psyche and the skin 34
4 Biochemistry of the skin 8	10 Practical clinic procedures 22	
5 Inflammation, microbiome, immunity and the skin 10	11 Dermoscopy 24	
6 Molecular genetics and the skin 12	12 Basics of medical therapy—topical treatments 28	

## 2 Diseases 37

### Eruptions 38

16 Psoriasis—epidemiology, pathophysiology and presentation 38
17 Psoriasis—topical treatment and disease complications 40
18 Psoriasis—systemic treatments 42
19 Psoriasis—systemic treatments: biologics and small molecule inhibitors 44

20 Eczema—acute, chronic and irritant 46
21 Eczema—allergic contact dermatitis and patch testing 50
22 Eczema—atopic eczema 52
23 Eczema—atopic dermatitis and systemic therapy 54

24 Eczema—other forms 56
25 Lichenoid eruptions 58
26 Papulosquamous eruptions 60
27 Erythroderma 62
28 Photodermatology 64

### Infections 66

29 Bacterial infection—staphylococcal and streptococcal 66
30 Other bacterial infections 68
31 Viral infections—warts and other viral infections 70

32 Viral infections—herpes simplex and herpes zoster 72
33 Human immunodeficiency virus disease and immunodeficiency syndromes 74
34 Fungal infections 76

35 Yeast infections and related disorders 78
36 Tropical infections and infestations 80
37 Infestations 82

### Disorders of specific skin structures 84

38 Sebaceous and sweat glands—acne 84
39 Sebaceous and sweat glands—rosacea and other disorders 86
40 Sebaceous and sweat glands—hidradenitis suppurativa 88
41 Disorders of hair—hair loss 90

42 Disorders of hair—excess hair, hair defects, scalp disorders and ethnic hair problems 92
43 Disorders of nails 94
44 Vascular and lymphatic diseases 96
45 Leg ulcers 98

46 Pigmentation—diseases showing hypo- and hyperpigmentary effects 100
47 Pigmentation—variations in people of colour 102

### Allergy and autoimmunity 104

48 Urticaria 104
49 Blistering disorders 106

50 Connective tissue diseases—lupus erythematosus and systemic sclerosis 108
--

51 Vasculitis and the reactive erythemas 112
--

### Internal medicine 114

52 Skin changes in internal conditions 114
--

53 Drug eruptions 116
-----------------------

54 Associations with malignancy 118
-------------------------------------

### Inherited disorders 120

55 Keratinization and blistering syndromes 120
--

56 Neurocutaneous disorders and other syndromes 122
---

### Skin tumours 124

57 Benign tumours—epidermal and dermal 124
58 Benign tumours—dermal structures and appendages 126
59 Naevi 128

60 Skin cancer— premalignant disorders 130
61 Skin cancer—basal cell carcinoma 132
62 Skin cancer—squamous cell carcinoma 134

63 Skin cancer—malignant melanoma 136
64 Cutaneous T-cell lymphomas, B-cell lymphomas and malignant dermal tumours 138
65 Ageing and photoageing of the skin 140

## 3 Special topics in dermatology 141

66 Phototherapy 142
67 Basic dermatologic surgery 144
68 Advanced dermatologic surgery 146
69 Cosmetics and cosmetic procedures 150
70 Paediatric dermatology—childhood eczemas and other dermatoses 152

71 Paediatric dermatology—vascular naevi and dermatoses of the newborn 154
72 The skin in old age 156
73 The skin in pregnancy 158
74 Genitourinary infections 160
75 Female genital dermatoses 162

76 Male genital dermatoses and perianal skin diseases 164
77 Occupation and the skin 166
78 Immunologic tests 168
Bibliography and online resources 171
Index 174

# Basic principles



# 1 Microanatomy of the skin

## Introduction

The skin is one of the largest organs in the body, having a surface area of 1.8 m<sup>2</sup> and making up about 16% of body weight. It develops in utero (Box 1.1), and although one of its most important functions is as a barrier to protect the body from noxious external factors, there is increasing recognition of the role of resident immune cells in skin function.

Skin is composed of three layers: the epidermis, the dermis and the subcutis (Fig. 1.1); it supports a complex population of microflora on the surface (skin microbiome) (p. 10).

## Epidermis

The epidermis is a stratified squamous epithelium that is about 0.1 mm thick, although the thickness is greater (0.8–1.4 mm) on the palms and soles. Its prime function is to act as a protective barrier. The main cells of the epidermis are *keratinocytes*, which produce the protein keratin. Keratinocytes are squamous cells

functionally similar to all other structural epithelial cells as found in the airways and gastrointestinal tract. Keratinocytes differentiate upwards through the epidermis, and their maturation states (p. 6) are divided into four stages (layers) (Fig. 1.2).

### Basal cell layer (stratum basale)

The basal cell layer of the epidermis is composed mostly of keratinocytes, of which a small proportion are stem cells that continuously divide. The cells contain keratin tonofilaments (p. 8) and are secured to the basement membrane (see Fig. 1.2) by hemidesmosomes. *Melanocytes* make up 5–10% of the basal cell population. These cells synthesize melanin (p. 8) and transfer it in melanosomes via dendritic processes to neighbouring keratinocytes.

Melanocytes are most numerous on the face and other exposed sites and are of neural crest origin. *Merkel cells* are also found, albeit infrequently, in the basal cell layer. These cells are closely associated with terminal filaments of cutaneous nerves

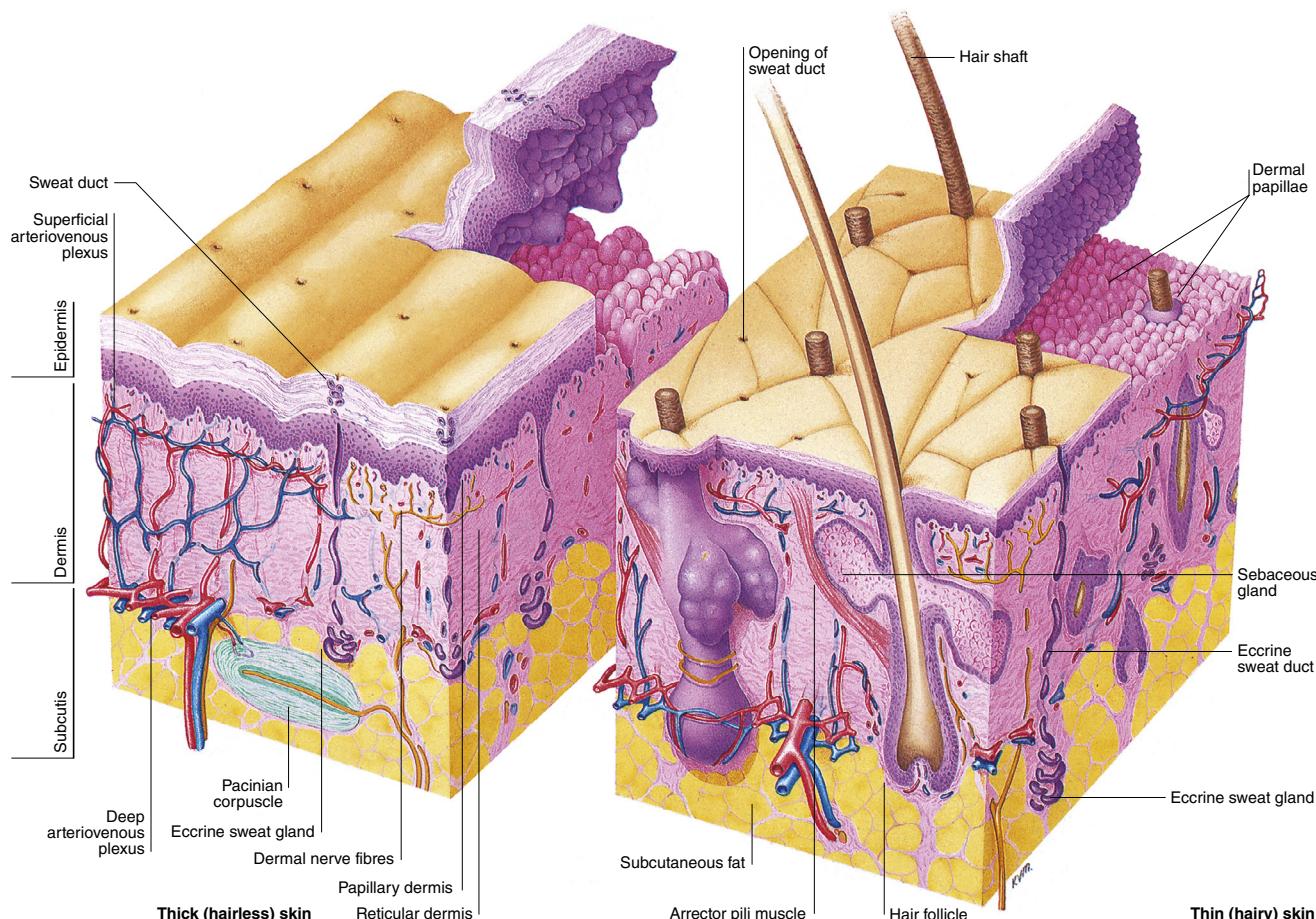
and seem to have a role in sensation. Their cytoplasm contains neuropeptide granules, neurofilaments and keratin. Basal keratinocytes synthesize antimicrobial peptides, which are important in defence against bacteria.

### Prickle cell layer (stratum spinosum)

Daughter basal cells migrate upwards to form this layer of polyhedral cells, which are interconnected by desmosomes (the 'prickles' seen at light microscope level). Keratin tonofibrils form a supportive mesh in the cytoplasm of these cells. *Langerhans cells* are mostly found in this layer; these dendritic, immunologically active cells are described fully on page 10.

### Granular cell layer (stratum granulosum)

Cells become flattened and lose their nuclei in the granular cell layer. Keratohyalin granules are seen in the cytoplasm together with membrane-coating granules (which expel their lipid contents into the intercellular spaces).



**Fig. 1.1 Structure of the skin.** The diagram shows a comparison between thick, hairless skin (plantar and planar) and thinner, hirsute skin.



**Fig. 70.5 Pityriasis alba.** A hypopigmented, slightly scaly patch on the left cheek. (Courtesy Anthony J Mancini, MD.)

small roundish, faintly scaly and slightly hypopigmented patches are seen, often on the face or upper arms. It is more frequent in summer and appears to be a mild form of eczema (Fig. 70.5).

### Other childhood dermatoses

Some uncommon but characteristic eruptions are found in childhood. These include:

- Measles
- Urticaria pigmentosa
- Langerhans cell histiocytosis
- Linear immunoglobulin A disease (p. 106)
- Kawasaki disease and other viral infections (p. 71)
- Ichthyosis (p. 120)
- Epidermolysis bullosa (p. 121)

### Measles

Measles is a serious generalized childhood infection due to an RNA morbillivirus (p 71). Widespread vaccine use from the 1960s meant that cases became uncommon, but the recent reduction in vaccination coverage has allowed measles to become resurgent in Europe, with attendant mortality and morbidity. After a short upper respiratory prodrome, with conjunctivitis and fever, the morbilliform rash starts on day 4, typically first behind the ears, then spreading generally (Fig. 70.6). White-on-red punctate Koplik spots on the buccal mucosa are pathognomonic. Pneumonia and encephalitis are complications, though most make a full recovery.

### Urticaria pigmentosa

Urticaria pigmentosa is characterized by multiple red-brown macules or papules on the trunk and limbs of an infant (Fig. 70.7). It is associated with c-KIT gene mutations. The lesions may become red, swollen and itchy after a bath or when rubbed, and blistering may occur. Histologically, there



**Fig. 70.6 Measles, showing the morbilliform eruption.** (From James WD, Berger TG, Elston DM. *Andrews' Diseases of the Skin*. 11th ed. Saunders; 2011.)



**Fig. 70.7 Mastocytosis nodules of juvenile urticaria pigmentosa.** Scattered nodules on the chest and shoulder are evident. They show some hyperpigmentation and slight surrounding erythema. Darier's sign of urtication on rubbing a lesion is virtually pathognomonic. (From Bologna JL, Jorizzo JL, Schaffer JV. *Dermatology*. 3rd ed. Saunders; 2012.)

are accumulations of mast cells in the dermis. The disorder normally resolves spontaneously before adolescence. There is a form with a later onset, usually beginning in adolescence or adult life, which rarely resolves and may involve internal organs—something that is uncommon in the childhood variety.

### Langerhans cell histiocytosis (histiocytosis X)

Langerhans cell histiocytosis is a rare and serious condition that normally involves internal organs. The skin signs are prominent, variable and include a seborrhoeic-like dermatitis, papules or pustules on the trunk, and ulceration, particularly of the flexures (Fig. 70.8). The skin, abdominal organs, lungs and bones are infiltrated by clonal myeloid precursors that differentiate into CD1a<sup>+</sup>/CD207<sup>+</sup> cells, now believed to represent inflammatory myeloid neoplasia. Skin biopsy is usually diagnostic. The prognosis is poorer when the onset is <2 years of age.



**Fig. 70.8 Langerhans cell histiocytosis.**

The disease may present with a seborrhoeic dermatitis-like eruption on the scalp, but papules and crusting are more prominent than would be anticipated in an eczema. (From James WD, Berger TG, Elston DM. *Andrews' Diseases of the Skin*. 11th ed. Saunders; 2011.)

### Paediatric dermatology—eczemas and other childhood dermatoses

Disorder	Age at onset	Clinical features
Napkin dermatitis	First few weeks–12 months	Glazed erythema that spares body folds Erosions may occur
Infantile seborrhoeic eczema	First few weeks	Moist scaly erythema Flexures and scalp affected
Candidiasis	Infancy	Erythema, with scaling and pustules Flexures affected Secondary infection found
Juvenile plantar dermatosis	School age to middle teens	Glazed red fissured skin on weightbearing forefeet and soles
Measles	Infancy and childhood	Upper respiratory prodrome, morbilliform rash, Koplik spots
Urticaria pigmentosa (cutaneous mastocytosis)	Mostly at 3–9 months	Red-brown macules or papules on trunk, which urticate when rubbed
Langerhans cell histiocytosis	All ages (different types)	Seborrhoeic-like dermatitis, papules/pustules, ulceration

# Index

Page numbers followed by '*f*' indicate figures, '*t*' indicate tables, '*b*' indicate boxes.

## A

Abrocitinib, 55  
Abscess, 16  
Acanthosis nigricans, 118*f*, 118  
Acne, 84  
    aetiopathogenesis of, 84*f*, 84  
    *agminata*, 86, 87*f*  
    clinical presentation of, 84*f*, 84  
    complications and differential diagnosis of, 85  
    facial, 85*f*  
    grading the severity of, 84  
    isotretinoin for, 35  
    management of, 85  
    psychiatric problems, 35  
    rare syndromes associated with, 85  
    scarring, 84*f*  
    vulgaris, 85  
Acné excoriée, 35*f*, 35  
Acquired angioedema, 104–105  
Acquired ichthyosis, 119  
Acral lentiginous malignant melanoma, 136*f*, 136  
Actinic keratoses, 130, 130*f*–131*f*  
    prurigo, 64, 103  
    reticuloid, 64  
Acute  
    allergic contact dermatitis, 19*f*  
    eczema, 49  
    febrile neutrophilic dermatosis, 113  
    generalized exanthematous pustulosis, 117  
    paronychia, 94  
    phototoxic drug eruption, 19*f*  
    pompholyx, 55*f*  
    urticaria, 104  
Acute eczema, 46, 48*f*  
    differential diagnosis of, 46  
    management of, 46  
Addison disease, 101*f*, 101  
Adrenaline, 105  
Adult-onset still disease, 111*f*, 111  
Advanced dermatological surgery, 146, 148  
Advancement flap, 146*f*, 146  
Aetiopathogenesis, 122  
Age prevalence, of dermatoses, 32, 33*t*  
Albinism, 100*f*, 100  
Allergic contact dermatitis, 151*f*, 151  
    aetiopathogenesis of, 50  
    allergen avoidance, 50  
    clinical presentation of, 50  
    definition of, 50  
    differential diagnosis of, 50  
    distribution clues for, 50*f*  
    management of, 50  
    nickel in watchstrap buckle, 50*f*  
Alopecia, 16  
Alopecia areata, 90, 90*f*–94*f*  
Alopecia totalis, 91*f*  
Amelanotic melanoma, in dermoscopy, 25*f*  
Anal fissures, 165  
Angioedema alone, 104

## B

Angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors, 104  
Annular, 58  
Anogenital warts, 70  
Antiandrogen, 85  
Antibiotics, 85  
Antibody-dependent cytotoxicity, 11  
Anticoagulants, and skin surgery, 147  
Antihistamines, 105  
Antimicrobials, 53  
Antiplatelet agents, and skin surgery, 148  
Apocrine sweat glands, 5  
Apremilast inhibitors, 45  
Arterial disease, 99  
Arterial ulcers, 99  
Arteriovenous malformations, 155  
Ashy dermatosis, 103  
Asteatotic eczema (eczema craquelé), 55, 57  
Asymmetric arthritis, 41  
Atopic dermatitis, 55*f*  
    biologics in, 54, 54*t*  
    immunosuppressant treatment of, 54*t*  
    small molecule inhibitor treatment of, 55*t*  
Atopic eczema  
    aetiopathogenesis of, 52  
    immunology, 52  
    incidence, 52  
    skin barrier, 52  
    clinical presentation of, 52  
        adults, 51*f*, 52  
        childhood, 51*f*, 52  
        infancy, 50*f*, 52  
    complications, 53  
    definition of, 52  
    differential diagnosis of, 53  
    management of, 53  
    treatment of, 53*t*  
Atrophy, 16  
Autoinflammatory syndromes, 105

## C

Blistering disorders, 106*f*, 106–107  
Blood flow, thermoregulation, 7*f*, 7  
Blood vessel disorders, 96, 96*t*  
Blood vessels, 5*f*, 5  
Blue naevi, 128  
Body dysmorphic disorder, 34  
Body sculpturing, 151  
Botox injection, 151*f*  
Botulinum toxins, 151  
Bowen disease, 134  
Brodalumab, 44  
Buccal mucosa, 58*f*  
Bulla, 16  
Bullous, 58  
Bullous pemphigoid, 106, 169*f*  
    aetiopathogenesis of, 106, 107*f*  
    clinical presentation of, 106  
    management of, 106  
Calcineurin inhibitors, 53  
Calciphilic uraemic arteriolopathy, 115  
Camouflage cosmetics, 150  
Campbell de Morgan spot, 126*f*, 126  
*Candida albicans*, 95*f*, 114  
*Candida albicans* infection, 79  
    clinical presentation of, 79  
    differential diagnosis of, 79*t*  
    management of, 79  
Candidiasis, 152  
Carbuncle, 67*f*  
Caustics, use of, 23  
Cautery, 145  
Cell-mediated hypersensitivity, 11  
Cellulitis, 69*f*, 69  
Cheilitis, 30*f*  
Cheiropompholyx, 56  
Chemicals, photodermatoses, 65*f*, 65  
Cherry angioma, 126*f*, 126  
Chilblains, 97  
Childhood  
    dermatoses, 153  
    eczemas and related disorders, 152  
Chloracne, 166*f*  
Chondrodermatitis nodularis, 126*f*, 126  
Chromate dermatitis, 167  
Chromosomes, human, 13*f*, 13  
Chronic  
    dermatitis, 48*f*  
    granulomatous disease, 75  
    mucocutaneous candidiasis, 75*f*, 75, 79*t*  
    paronychia, 94  
    plaque psoriasis, 43*f*  
    spontaneous urticaria, 104  
    superficial dermatitis, plaques of, 61*f*  
Chronic actinic dermatitis, 64*f*, 64  
    clinical presentation of, 64  
    differential diagnosis and management of, 64  
Chronic eczema, 48*f*, 49  
    differential diagnosis of, 48  
    management of, 48

## D

Dandruff, 93*f*, 93  
Darier disease, 120  
    clinical presentation of, 121*f*, 121  
    management of, 121  
Deep mycoses, 81, 81*t*  
Delayed hypersensitivity, 11  
Delusional infestation, 34  
Dermabrasion, 151  
Dermatitis artefacta, 34*f*, 34  
Dermatitis herpetiformis, 107*f*, 107, 168  
    aetiopathogenesis of, 107  
    clinical presentation of, 107  
    differential diagnosis of, 107  
    management of, 107  
Dermatofibroma (fibrous histiocytoma), 124, 125*f*  
Dermatofibrosarcoma protuberans, 139