Dear Alice,

The skin underneath my watchband has been developing a rash over the last month or so. I switched the wrist that I wear my watch on, and soon thereafter the rash popped up again. I've had the band for almost three months though and I have never noticed this problem before. Do you know what it might be? Is it probably totally unrelated to my watchband?

—Time to get a new band?

Answer

Dear Time to get a new band?,

Tic tock, sounds like it may be time to get a new band! While the exact cause of an allergic reaction may be a real mystery, allergies may be unpredictable and cause intense responses. Allergies may result from any combination of things, including irritation over time, a reaction between the watchband and your soap or perspiration, or an allergy to the material of the watchband. Either way, the watchband seems to be a surefire piece of the puzzle.

It sounds like you may be experiencing contact dermatitis, an inflammation of the skin caused by direct contact with an irritating substance. Before you bid your timepiece adieu, check and see what material it is made of. Then, you may want to get a new one made of something else. Nickel, a silver-colored metal and a common allergen, is often in stainless steel jewelry, particularly in water-resistant watchcases. People who are sensitive to nickel might want to avoid watches that contain any nickel. Alternatives include watchbands made of synthetic materials, leather, or other nickel-free metals. If you have other watches without itches, consider sticking to watches made of the same allergy-free materials.

Other possible causes for your wrist-rash blues may include bacteria build up in the watchband, perspiration wearing down the watchband over time, and exposure to allergic metals (such as nickel). You may try wiping the case often with a clean, dry cloth (or a slightly damp cloth if the watch is water-resistant). Also, taking off your watch at night may help decrease the length of time it's in direct contact with your skin.
Your watch should keep you on track, not set you behind! If you have any other questions, talking with your health care provider may help.

Here's to healthy and happy timekeeping!

Alice!

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