Facial Redness Associated with Rosacea

Media Backgrounder

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Overview

Reddening of the face, or facial redness, is a normal occurrence usually lasting only a short time, particularly when triggered by emotional factors such as embarrassment, stress or anger.

However, emotional factors are not the only cause of facial redness and it can also be the result of certain medical conditions. Rosacea, a treatable skin condition, is one such condition.

What is rosacea?

Rosacea is a chronic, inflammatory skin condition that is known to affect around 40 million people worldwide. The condition encompasses various signs and symptoms that typically fluctuate between periods of remission and exacerbation.

Primary features of the condition include:  
- Transient redness of facial skin
- Persistent redness of facial skin
- Papules and pustules on the face
- Small visible blood vessels on the face

Secondary features include:  
- A burning or stinging sensation in the face
- Dry appearance of the facial skin
- Thickening of the skin on the cheeks, nose, chin, or forehead
- Eye irritation and sensitivity to light, watery or bloodshot eyes
- Facial swelling (caused by excessive build-up of fluid)

Many people who suffer from rosacea may assume that they just blush easily and that they might be sun-sensitive. However, the condition causes a characteristic pattern of persistent facial redness with intermittent flushing on the forehead, chin, cheeks and lower half of the nose, often started or exacerbated by particular triggers.

Treatment of rosacea is usually recommended based on the symptoms experienced. Left untreated, rosacea sufferers can experience significant emotional and social impairment and may be perceived as less healthy, reliable and successful compared to unaffected individuals.

Certain triggers can cause a facial flare-up or worsen the condition, and understanding what these are, is the first step in helping the problem (refer to “common causes/triggers” section on page 2).
What is facial redness associated with rosacea?

Intermittent facial flushing is the earliest sign of rosacea, while persistent facial redness is the most common sign of rosacea and is caused when small blood vessels in the face dilate (enlarge) and become more visible through the skin, causing the face to have a red appearance.\textsuperscript{5,6} This facial redness associated with rosacea, is often mistaken for acne, eczema, excessive skin exposure to UV, or a skin allergy.

Over time, if left untreated, the redness and flushing tends to become ruddier and more persistent, and bumps and pimples can develop.\textsuperscript{6}

What are the common triggers of facial redness associated with rosacea?

A number of triggers have been identified that cause blood vessels in the face to dilate, leading to facial redness associated with rosacea:\textsuperscript{7,8,9,10}

- **Sun exposure**: A US survey found that 81\% of 1,066 rosacea sufferers said that sun exposure was the number one trigger of their symptoms\textsuperscript{11}
- **Food**: Certain foods, for example spicy foods and large hot meals can trigger facial redness flare-ups
- **Beverages**: Many people think that facial redness is caused by alcohol abuse, but this is incorrect. However, alcohol and hot beverages can trigger or worsen redness flare-ups
- **Temperature & weather**: Extreme weather, acute changes in temperature, and hot baths or showers can cause an increase in blood flow to the face and result in facial redness
- **Skin products**: Certain products which contain alcohol or fragrance may cause irritation to the skin and result in facial redness. Ingredients such as alcohol, witch hazel, fragrance, menthol, peppermint, and eucalyptus oil can trigger rosacea symptoms, including facial redness
- **Exercise**: Intensive work-outs can lead to overheating of the face, triggering redness flare-ups
- **Emotional influences**: Emotions such as embarrassment, stress or anger can lead to facial redness flare-ups
- **Medical conditions**: Conditions like menopause, chronic coughs, high blood pressure and some medications can trigger facial redness flare-ups
Who typically suffers from facial redness associated with rosacea?

Facial redness associated with rosacea affects about two to three times more women than men. However, more severe symptoms are observed in men. This is mainly due to the fact that men delay seeking medical help until the condition has reached a more advanced stage.

The age of onset of facial redness associated with rosacea is usually between 30-50 years and individuals with fairer skin are at a greatest risk of being affected by the condition.

Some people may have a genetic predisposition to developing facial redness associated with rosacea. A survey conducted on 2,052 sufferers showed that 33% of respondents had at least one parent of Irish heritage, and 27% had a parent of English descent. Other ethnic groups with higher rates of rosacea included people of Scandinavian, Scottish, Welsh, or eastern European descent.

How is facial redness associated with rosacea diagnosed?

Facial redness associated with rosacea is often under-recognised and under-treated, and many sufferers do not know their facial redness is caused by an underlying medical condition.

Currently there are no diagnostic laboratory tests available for identifying facial redness associated with rosacea. However, a physician will be able to diagnose the condition by conducting a thorough examination of the patient and a review of their medical history. They will then be able to advise on the best course of treatment.

The early diagnosis and treatment of facial redness associated with rosacea is important to enable the controlling of the symptoms, potentially prevent the condition from progressing and therefore relieve the emotional burden associated with the condition.

What is the impact of having facial redness associated with rosacea?

**Emotional burden:**

As facial redness associated with rosacea is a conspicuous and visible symptom affecting the physical appearance of a sufferer, it can be a worrying and distressing condition. Individuals diagnosed with the condition are often affected emotionally and by social stigmas, and have been reported to experience depression, anxiety, embarrassment and lowered self-esteem because of their condition.
The Face Values: Global Perceptions Survey

The recent survey of 6,831 adults aged 25 to 64 years across eight countries showed that people with facial redness associated with rosacea may be disadvantaged when it comes to first impressions.

According to the survey, images of faces with redness received less positive assessments on a number of personality characteristics and were perceived to be less intelligent, trustworthy, reliable, successful and confident compared to those without facial redness.

Self-reports from facial redness sufferers also highlighted concerns about their condition and the negative impact on daily life.4

Are there any treatments available for facial redness associated with rosacea?

While the majority of skin products can conceal the symptoms of facial redness, they are not effective long term treatments and do not address the underlying cause of the condition.

Facial redness sufferers can manage their symptoms by identifying and avoiding lifestyle and environmental factors that trigger or aggravate their flare-ups (refer to "common causes/triggers" section on page 2).20

Sufferers of facial redness associated with rosacea should check their skincare routine with their dermatologist or GP, to ensure that this is compatible with their skin-type. Sufferers are often advised to clean their face with a mild and non-abrasive cleanser, then rinse with lukewarm water and blot the face dry with a thick cotton towel. In addition, they are advised to protect their face from sun exposure by using a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher.6

However, controlling triggers is not the only way to deal with facial redness associated with rosacea. Recent scientific advances mean that there are now new and effective treatments available from a dermatologist or GP. According to the Face Values: Global Perceptions Survey, people whose rosacea has been diagnosed are significantly more likely to have it under control compared to those who had not received a formal diagnosis.4

Initial treatment often involves topical therapy, on top of avoiding trigger factors and adopting a suitable skincare routine, to bring the condition under immediate control. This is followed by long-term use of the topical therapy alone to maintain remission. When appropriate, treatments with lasers, intense pulsed light sources or other medical and surgical devices may be used to remove visible blood vessels and reduce extensive redness.6
References: