

Atopic Dermatitis/Eczema Care

Pediatric and Adolescent Dermatology



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Atopic Dermatitis, also known as **eczema**, is a common chronic skin problem in children.

- Eczema is a stressful disease for children and families. It can flare up unexpectedly and causes significant itching.
- There is no cure for eczema, but it can usually be managed by following a daily skincare routine. The right kind of skin care helps control the symptoms and prevent complications.
- Eczema will often improve as children get older. Some will even outgrow the condition completely.

What causes Eczema?

- The exact cause is unknown but it is at least partly caused by genetics (inherited).
- The main function of the skin is to provide a protective barrier. In patients with eczema, this barrier is inadequate and the skin is easily irritated and dry.
- Another main function of the skin is as a first defense in the immune system. In eczema, the immune system reacts differently than in people with normal skin. The immune system can be overactive, causing redness and swelling even though there is no infection.
- Eczema can also be related to other “allergic” or “atopic” conditions, including allergies, asthma, and hay fever.

Symptoms of Eczema

- People with eczema have very dry skin. The dry skin itches and may crack, and the cracked skin can become infected. When the eczema flares up, the skin may look red and irritated.
- On infants and young children, patches of eczema may ooze and look “weepy.” A child’s face, body, and the outside of the arms and legs are most likely to be affected.
- In older children, the skin may appear thick and scaly. Areas of skin folds such as the neck, underarms, and behind the knees are commonly affected, however eczema can be anywhere on the body.

Eczema and Allergies

- Some children with eczema have respiratory allergies, environmental allergies or asthma, and a few children have food allergies.
- If your child has allergies, the eczema may flare up when he or she has an allergic reaction. If your child has eczema but does not have any other symptoms of allergy, we do not usually recommend allergy testing. In most cases, it is not helpful.

Eczema Triggers

- *Change of seasons AND/OR very hot or cold weather*
- *Allergens:* dust mites, grass, pet fur/dander
- *Irritants:* tobacco smoke, wool/synthetic fabrics like nylon, saliva (from drooling), certain chemical ingredients
- *Fragrance* (something that makes a product smell good) is another common trigger of eczema. Many cosmetic and household products contain fragrance including: moisturizers, shampoos, soaps, laundry detergents, fabric softeners. It is important to use only products that are fragrance-free. Unscented products are NOT the same as fragrance-free and often contain extra “masking” fragrance.

Managing Eczema

- It is important to remember that there is no cure for eczema. Most parents find that they can control their child’s eczema by following the daily skin care routine that is outlined in this information sheet.
- *The most important part of the routine is to keep your child’s skin moist so it does not dry out.* It may take some trial and error to find what skin moisturizers work best for your child.

Skin Care Routine for Your Child

- 1) *Baths.* A daily bath is helpful for some children with eczema. In these children, you may find it helpful to do longer, lukewarm baths daily. However some children seem to flare with bathing. In these cases, try to limit the bath to a maximum of ten minutes every 1-3 days. Always use lukewarm water, as hot water removes the natural oils from your child’s skin and contributes to dryness.
 - a. *Use as little soap as possible.* Use soap only on areas of your child’s body that get dirty or smell bad (i.e. underarms, hands, feet, and bottom). Use a mild soap from the list below. Many soaps can be harsh and remove the skin’s natural oils.
 - b. *Pat your child semi-dry after the bath.* Do not rub. Rubbing will irritate the skin.
 - c. Occasionally your doctor may instruct you to add a small amount of household bleach to the bathwater to decrease infections.
- 2) *Moisturizer*
 - a. *Apply a moisturizer to the entire body immediately after the bath while the skin is still wet.* Moisturizer keeps the skin from drying out. Use the moisturizer everywhere, not just on the affected areas. Remember, children with eczema have dry skin all over, and putting moisturizer everywhere can keep the eczema from flaring or getting worse.
 - b. *Apply moisturizer at least twice during the day.* Moisturizer should be applied twice daily even when the skin appears normal. Some children may need 3-5 applications per day.
 - c. In addition, apply moisturizer any time the skin is dry or flaky or any time your child feels itchy. Many parents note the skin looks dry shortly after moisturizing – it is still working and necessary to continue.
- 3) *Avoid triggers.*
 - a. Some triggers are difficult to avoid, such as change in seasons, dust mites, and dander.
 - b. Other triggers are more easily avoided such as fragrance, tobacco smoke, and synthetic fibers.
 - c. Remember that many natural, organic ingredients can still be irritating to children with eczema.
 - d. A good rule of thumb is that if the product smells nice, it is probably not the right choice for a child with eczema.
 - e. Saliva is often a trigger for babies as they are teething and learning to eat solid food. To avoid the effect of saliva on the skin, apply a layer of ointment (i.e. Vaseline or Aquaphor) around the mouth frequently throughout the day and before feedings.

Choosing a Soap or Cleanser

Some soap(s) are less irritating and drying than others. You may need to try several before you find a soap that does not irritate your child's skin. The soaps listed below have worked for other families. You can find them in most grocery stores. *Make sure the soap or cleanser you use on your child is always fragrance free.*

- Dove Sensitive Skin Bar Soap or Body Wash
- Cerave Hydrating Cleansing Bar or Hydrating Body Wash
- Cetaphil Gentle Cleansing Bar or Gentle Skin Cleanser or Ultra Gentle Body Wash
- Vanicream Cleansing Bar or Gentle Body Wash
- Aveeno Moisturizing Bar or Skin Relief Body Wash
- Aveeno products often contain oat extract which can calm inflammation in eczema
- Aquaphor Baby Gentle Wash & Shampoo
- Purpose Gentle Cleansing Bar

Choosing a Moisturizer

It can be overwhelming to choose a moisturizer. Ointments work better than creams, but sometimes are too sticky during the day. You might want to use a cream during the day and an ointment at night. Creams/ointments come in a jar or tub and will work better than lotions that are in bottles or pumps. Any moisturizer works best when applied to damp skin because a seal is formed, holding water in the skin. Just like soaps, make sure that the product is fragrance-free (not unscented). Some moisturizers that often work well are listed here. You can buy them at pharmacies or grocery stores.

- Vanicream Moisturizing Cream
- Cerave Moisturizing Cream
- Cetaphil Moisturizing Cream
- Aquaphor Healing Ointment
- Vaseline Petroleum Jelly
- Vanicream Moisturizing Ointment
- Aveeno Skin Relief Moisture Repair Cream
- Aveeno Cracked Skin Relief Cica Balm
- Eucerin Eczema Relief Cream

Itching

Itching is a difficult part of eczema. Most of the time you can control your child's itching by following a good daily skin care regime. There are some additional steps you can take when your child's itching gets worse.

- Apply moisturizer every time your child's skin looks or feels dry. For severe itching, try putting a damp, cool washcloth on the affected skin.
- You can also try giving your child an antihistamine for itching. Benadryl (diphenhydramine) is available without a prescription and often works well. If you are not sure what dose to use, please call your doctor. This medicine often causes sleepiness so it is most useful for nighttime itching.
- Unless your child has environmental allergies that cause their eczema to worsen, other antihistamines such as Zyrtec (cetirizine) or Allegra (loratadine) are unlikely to help with your child's itching.
- Please do not use any topical anti-itch medications without asking your doctor as they can be very irritating to the skin.
- Distraction techniques can also be used when your child is itching.

Prescribed topical medications

Topical medications are often prescribed to control itching and reduce redness (inflammation). The medication should be applied directly to the skin **before** a plain moisturizer, no more than twice daily. It will NOT work better

if used more often than twice daily. You should put a small amount of the medication on your fingertip and gently rub a thin layer into the rash areas only. You should try to avoid normal skin.

Prescription topical medications are often steroid medications or non-steroid medications (Protopic/tacrolimus or Elidel/pimecrolimus). All of these medications work to decrease the inflammation that leads to redness and itching. Non-steroid medications are “controllers” and should be used at the first sign of rash. Steroid medicines vary in strength and your doctor will provide you with specific instructions for how, when, and where to use them. In general, you should not use stronger steroids on the face, genitals, or underarms unless your doctor instructs you to do so.

Flare-Ups

There may be times when your child’s eczema will worsen. When your child has a flare-up, his or her skin may:

- Become red or irritated
- Ooze or look weepy
- Itch more than normal

Flare-ups can happen anytime, and many different things can cause them. Flare-ups may happen:

- When the weather changes
- When your child is sick
- When your child is under emotional stress
- When your child has contact with a trigger
- For no apparent reason

Wet Wraps

Wet wraps are a very effective way to calm down a flare and can be done before calling the doctor. They can be done one to two times a day.

- First apply topical steroid to areas of rash THEN apply a thick moisturizer to all areas of skin.
- For infants and toddlers, take a pair of long-sleeved, long-legged pajamas and run under warm water. Wring out excess water.
 - For older children, warm, moist towels, long socks, long johns, etc. can be used to wrap the skin.
 - Warm, moist socks can be used for wraps on hands and feet.
 - Anything used should be 100% cotton.
- Put warm, wet pajamas on the child, then cover with a dry set of pajamas or wrap in a dry towel or blanket.
- Leave on for several hours or overnight.
- Remove the wet pajamas and apply additional moisturizer.
- If only certain areas are flaring (i.e. elbows, knees, etc) “spot treatments” can be done instead of full body wet wraps.

Infections

Children with eczema are more likely to get skin infections. These infections can be caused by a bacteria, virus, or fungus. Watch for any of these signs of infection:

- Fever
- Redness
- Swelling
- Drainage or weepy skin
- Blisters
- Pus bumps
- Scabbing

If your child develops any of these symptoms, please your doctor. We may need to see him or her to decide what treatment will be best. If you are concerned your child may have a skin infection and is acting ill/has fever, they should be seen urgently by their primary care doctor, dermatologist, or possibly in an emergency room.

For School-Age Children

School-age children can learn to care for their skin at school. However, they will need the cooperation of their teachers. It helps if teachers understand that eczema is not contagious.

- Your child should carry moisturizer to apply any time he or she starts itching.
- Any time your child exercises enough to sweat, even at recess, he or she should pat dry and apply more moisturizer.

Other Ways to Help Your Child

Most children do best in loose-fitting, cotton clothing. It can also help to wash new clothes before your child wears them. Keep the temperature in your house steady and comfortable for your child. Children who have eczema often feel better if they are somewhat cooler. Frequent changes in the temperature may cause flare-ups. Do not use wet wipes as they may dry out the skin.

For Other Caregivers

If your child has a sitter or goes to daycare, you will need to give special instructions to these caregivers. It is important to help them understand that your child's eczema is not contagious. Ask them to:

- Apply moisturizer on a schedule.
- Massage additional moisturizer into the affected area if your child starts itching.
- Give any medications prescribed by your doctor as directed.

When to Call the Doctor

Please call your doctor's office if you notice any of the following:

- Your child's skin seems worse even though you are adhering to the gentle skin care routine and using topical medications as directed.
- Your child has signs of a skin infection including blisters, pus bumps, or drainage.
- You have any questions about your child's condition or care plan.

Eczema Medication Instructions

1. Moisturize ALL skin

Apply a thick, fragrance-free moisturizer at least two times daily. Ointments are better than creams.

2. Apply topical anti-inflammatories to ONLY AREAS WITH ECZEMA (i.e. red, rough, raised, itchy areas)

STEROIDS

<u>Face</u>	<u>Scalp</u>	<u>Body/Arms/Legs</u>
Hydrocortisone 2.5%	Fluocinolone 0.01%	Triamcinolone 0.1%
Desonide 0.05%	Fluocinonide 0.05%	Mometasone 0.1%
Triamcinolone 0.025%	Mometasone 0.1%	Clobetasol 0.05%
Other:	Clobetasol 0.05%	Betamethasone
	Other:	Other:
For flares, the above medications should be used 2x/day for up to 14 days.		
For maintenance, the above medications can be used 2-3 days per week.		

Itch Medicine by Mouth

Take _____ of _____ by mouth every _____ hours as needed for itching.

Antibiotics/Antivirals

Apply _____ to open sores, yellow crusted areas, or pus bumps _____ x/day for _____ days.

Take _____ of _____ by mouth _____ x/day for _____ days.

Bleach Baths (also known as “swimming pool baths”)

Add 1/4 cup of household bleach to a full tub of lukewarm bathwater 2-3 times per week.