



Eczema – Atopic Dermatitis

What is eczema?

- *Generalized dry and itchy skin*
Eczema, or Atopic Dermatitis, is sometimes called “an itch that rashes” since when the skin is itchy, and scratched a lot, a rash develops.
- *Red rash*
The rash of eczema often involves the creases – for example, the front of the elbow joint, and the back of the knee and neck. In infants, it's often on the cheeks, forehead, trunk and extremities. Infants are often fussy and show scissoring of the lower legs in attempts to scratch. The skin is sensitive to irritation and gets infected more easily.

Eczema is usually diagnosed clinically, since there is no laboratory test. Lots of children have it – more and more over the last several years. We don't know why it is more common now. Children often start to have eczema when they are young (even small infants), and sometimes it disappears when they get older. Families who have asthma, hay fever, and food allergies often have more eczema as well – these are all different forms of allergies.

The tough thing about eczema is that we often can't figure out what the child is reacting to – even allergy tests don't always show any allergies, and trying to figure it out can be very frustrating. Children who get severe eczema before six months old are more likely to be reacting to a food allergen, but not always. If you think a certain food makes your child's eczema worse, avoid that food and talk to us about it.

Luckily, we can make the itch and the rash go away with various creams and ointments, and children often outgrow their eczema.

Is there anything that makes eczema worse?

- Certain types of clothing – like wool, nylon, or other harsh fabrics – can make it worse. Dress your child in soft, loose clothing.
- Extremes of weather, and also dry air, can make eczema worse. Overheating and perspiration may also make the rash worse, so don't overdress your child.
- Stress can aggravate eczema.
- Anything that stimulates the immune system, such as colds or other illnesses, may cause a flare-up of eczema.

What are the complications of eczema?

Disturbed sleep due to chronic itching is common in infants and young children with eczema. An infant or young child may just be irritable. When scratching and more severe eczema causes a break in the skin, there is a risk of secondary bacterial or viral infection of the skin, which may require treatment.

(Continued)



General tips to control eczema:

- Use a very gentle detergent for your child's clothing. Some examples include "Dreft", or "Free and sensitive" products from "All", "Cheer" and "Tide". Also, double rinse clothing when possible, to get as much detergent out of the fabric as possible.
- Don't use fabric softener in the washer or dryer; these chemicals which help to make fabrics feel softer may aggravate eczema.
- Keep fingernails trimmed short, smooth and clean, to decrease skin infections from scratching.
- Use a "non soap" or soap without perfumes or dyes. Some examples include Cetaphil RestoraDerm Body Wash; Cetaphil Cleansers, Dove, Aveeno, Neutrogena or Basis.
- Use lukewarm water for baths or showers. Hot water can further dry out the skin.
- Moisturize the skin after bathing, before it air dries completely.

How is eczema treated?

There are a few key points in the treatment of eczema:

- Maintain skin hydration. Moisturize, moisturize and moisturize. Oh, did we say moisturize? This is a key part of eczema treatment, which has to be done frequently, even when the skin looks healthy. Look for non-scented thick creams or ointments like "CereVe", "Cetaphil RestoraDerm" or "Eucerin". Avoid thin lotions, since when they evaporate from the skin, they can make the dryness worse again. Following baths, pat dry your child's skin instead of rubbing. While the skin is still a little moist, apply the ointment or the moisturizing cream. Throughout the day, reapply moisturizer to the dry areas.
- Control the itch. Scratching not only makes eczema worse, but also sometimes causes secondary skin infections and disrupts sleep. Moisturizing will help the itching, as will topical corticosteroid medications. Keep your child's fingernails short. We may also recommend an oral antihistamine to control the itching.
- Treat the inflammation. During flare-ups we may prescribe topical corticosteroid medications. These vary in strength, and should be used only as advised by us. Long-term use, especially with the strongest prescription versions, can cause side effects like thinning of skin. There are newer preparations available in oil form to treat large areas of skin and some non-steroidal preparations which affect the immune system. Act quickly as soon as there is itching or redness, and apply the topical medicine prescribed, rubbing in for 10-20 seconds. Then apply the moisturizer after the medicine.
- Treat the secondary infections. By looking at your child's skin and sometimes by doing some tests, we can determine if skin is infected with bacteria or viruses, and treat it accordingly. If this happens often, we'll talk to you about ways to prevent it.
- Allergies and Eczema. Sometimes food, pollen or other allergies can make eczema worse. These are called "triggers". Sometimes we'll recommend seeing an allergist to help identify these triggers, and to help you avoid them.

Please call us if you have any questions about your child's eczema. We are here to help you, and with optimal treatments, eczema can be well controlled.