



ECZEMA (ATOPIC DERMATITIS)

What is eczema?

Eczema is a red, itchy rash. It may start on your child's cheeks at 2-6 months old, or it may be present in the creases of the elbows, wrists, ankles, and knees on an older child. If scratched, the rash becomes raw and weepy, and can become infected.

What is the cause?

Eczema is an inherited type of sensitive, dry skin. If your child has asthma or hay fever, or other family members have eczema, it is more likely that your child will have eczema. Flare-ups occur when there is contact with irritating substances (for example, soap or chlorine). Hot baths or showers also contribute to eczema in children.

In 30% of infants with severe eczema, certain foods cause the eczema to flare up. If you suspect a particular food (for example, cow's milk, eggs, or peanut butter) is causing your child's flare-ups, avoid the food for 2 weeks and then reedit to your child one time. If the food is causing flare-ups, the eczema should become itchy and red within 2 hours of eating the food. If this occurs, avoid giving the food to your child and talk to your doctor about alternatives.

How long does it last?

This is a chronic condition and may go away during adolescence. The goal is control, not cure. The early treatment of any itching can help prevent a severe flare-up.

How can I take care of my child?

• Moisturizing cream

Apply a moisturizing cream once or twice daily every day. Examples of moisturizing creams are Eucerin, Cetaphil, and Aquaphor. Children with eczema always have dry skin. After a bath, help trap the moisture in the skin by putting cream all over the child's body while still damp. Apply it after you have put steroid cream on any itchy areas.

• Steroid creams or ointments

Steroid creams or ointments are the main treatment of the itch of eczema. Apply a mild steroid cream to any spot that itches and for mild flare-ups. An example of a mild steroid cream is over-the-counter hydrocortisone (i.e. Cortaid 10). For severe itching or rash, you may use a stronger steroid cream as directed by your doctor.

• Bathing

Your child should have one bath a day for 10 minutes, in puke-warm water. Eczema is very sensitive to soaps, especially bubble bath. Young children can usually be cleaned without any soaps. For older children or teenagers, use a nondrying hypoallergenic soap such as Dove, Neutrogena, or Aveeno. Keep shampoo off the areas with eczema.

• Itching

At the first sign of itching, apply the mild steroid cream to the area that itches. Keep your child's fingernails cut short. Also, rinse your child's hands with water frequently to avoid infecting the eczema.

• Antihistamine medicine

An antihistamine medicine (i.e. Benadryl) may be used at bedtime for itching that is keeping your child from getting to sleep or causing them to wake up during the night.

What can be done to prevent eczema?

- Try to breast-feed infants at high risk for eczema. Otherwise, use a hydrolyzed formula. If that's unavailable, use a soy-based formula rather than a cow's milk-based formula. Avoid introducing solids until 6 months of age
- If certain foods cause flare-ups, avoid them
- Avoid wool fibers and clothes made of other scratchy, rough materials
- Wear clothes made of cotton or cotton blends as much as possible
- Avoid synthetic fibers and materials that hold in heat. Also avoid overdressing
- Avoid triggers that cause eczema to flare up, such as excessive heat, sweating, excessive cold, dry air (use a humidifier), chlorine, swimming pools and spas, harsh chemicals, and soaps
- Never use bubble bath - it can cause a major flare-up
- Keep your child off the grass during grass pollen season (May and June)
- Important: Keep your child away from anyone with fever blisters or cold sores. The herpes virus can cause a serious skin infection in children with eczema.

When should I call my child's doctor?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- The rash looks infected and your child has a fever
- The rash flares up after contact with fever blisters

Call within 24 hours if:

- The rash becomes raw and open in several places
- The rash looks infected (red streaks, pus, yellow scabs), but without a fever
- The rash hasn't greatly improved after 2 days of treatment
- You have other concerns or questions