

**Eczema Care**  
**Pediatric and Adolescent Dermatology**  
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**DISCLAIMER:**

**Not having examined your child and not certain of  
diagnosis, these are only suggested guidelines**

**Atopic Dermatitis**, also known as **eczema**, is a chronic skin problem. Eczema is a frustrating and stressful disease for families to deal with. It can flare up unexpectedly, and it causes terrible itching. We do not know what causes eczema, and there is no cure for it. However, eczema can be managed by following a daily skin-care routine. The right kind of skin care helps control the symptoms and prevent complications. In addition, many children's eczema will improve as they get older.

**Symptoms of Eczema**

People with eczema have very dry skin, and their skin dries out quickly. 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." At this age, 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. At this age, the child is most likely to be affected at skin folds, such as the neck, under the arms, and behind the knees.

**Eczema and Allergies**

Some children with eczema have respiratory allergies or asthma, and a few children have food allergies. These allergies may cause eczema flare-ups, so it can be helpful to know what your child is allergic to. 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.

## Managing 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. If you have questions about your child's skin care plan or about a product, please call us.

## Skin Care Routine for Your Child

- 1) *Keep your child's bath short.* Try to limit the bath to five or ten minutes each day. Use lukewarm water. Hot water removes the natural oils from your child's skin. The hotter the water, the more it will dry out your child's skin.
- 2) *Use as little soap as possible.* Use soap only on areas of your child's body that get dirty: hands, feet, and bottom. Use a mild soap. Soaps and shampoos also remove the skin's natural oils.
- 3) *Pat your child dry after the bath.* Do not rub. Rubbing will irritate the skin even more.
- 4) *Apply a moisturizer immediately to the entire body.* 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. Putting moisturizer all over can keep the eczema from getting worse.
- 5) *Apply moisturizer during the day.* Apply moisturizer to your child's entire body at least four times during the day and again at bedtime. In addition, apply moisturizer any time the skin is dry, flaky, or scaly, or any time your child feels itchy.
- 6) *Swimming in pools (chlorinated water) may dry out the skin.* Bathe your child using our guidelines above if he or she has been swimming in chlorinated pool water, then follow with moisturizing.

## Choosing a Soap

Some soaps are less irritating 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.

- Dove Unscented
- Basis
- Purpose
- Cetaphil

Some families prefer to use soap substitutes. Some of these can be used without water. Please ask us for directions if you are going to use a soap substitute. You can buy the following soap substitutes at most pharmacies or grocery stores:

- Cetaphil
- Aquanil
- Moisturel

### **Choosing a Moisturizer**

There are three kinds of moisturizers: lotions, creams, and ointments. Some brands come in more than one form. Creams or ointments work better for eczema than lotions. Usually the ointments work best, and they may stay on the skin longer than creams. However, they are harder to use because they are thick. Also, they may be messy because they are greasy. You may find that it works well to use an ointment at bedtime and a cream during the day. Some moisturizers that often work well are listed here. You can buy them at pharmacies or grocery stores.

- VaniCream (cream)
- Cera Ve (cream)
- Eucerin (cream)
- Moisturel (cream)
- Cetaphil (cream)
- Dermovan (cream)
- Aquaphor (ointment)
- Vaseline petroleum jelly (ointment)

These moisturizers have no perfumes or fragrances. For this reason, they are less likely to irritate your child's skin.

### **Itching**

Most of the time you can control your child's itching by following the daily skin care plan. 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. This usually helps control itching. For severe itching, try putting a damp, cool washcloth on the affected skin. You can try giving your child an antihistamine for itching. For example, you can buy Benadryl without a prescription, and it often works well. Antihistamines are given by mouth. If you are not sure what dose to use, please give us a call. An antihistamine can make your child sleepy. If this is a problem, you may want to give it to your child just before bedtime. If your child is taking any other medicines, please let us know. Talk to your dermatologist or pediatrician before giving your child any medicines that you buy without a prescription.

## **Flare-Ups**

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

- Become red or irritated
- Ooze or look weepy
- Appear thick and scaly
- Itch

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
- For no apparent reason

Your doctor may prescribe medicines to reduce the symptoms of a flare-up. Some medicines are applied to the skin. Others are taken by mouth. Anytime the doctor prescribes medicines for your child, make sure you know:

- How to use or give the medicine
- How often and how much to use
- What side effects to watch for

## **Infections**

Children with eczema are most 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
- Scabbing

If your child develops any of these symptoms, please call us. We may need to see him or her to decide what treatment will be best. In some cases we may order lab tests (called cultures) to help us identify the cause of the infection.

## **If Your Child Wears Diapers**

Use a damp cloth to clean your child. Do not use baby wipes. They can irritate and dry the skin. Use soap or a soap substitute only if necessary. Every time you change your child's diaper, apply moisturizer. Put moisturizer all over, not just on the diaper area.

## **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. Any time your child exercises enough to sweat, even at recess, he or she should:

- Pat dry (do not rub)
- Apply moisturizer all over
- If possible, take a shower (do not use hot water)

\*\*\* Your child should carry moisturizer to apply any time he or she starts itching.

## **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 often do better if they are somewhat cooler. Frequent changes in the temperature may cause flare-ups. Do not use wet wipes, they may dry out the skin.

## **For Other Caregivers**

If your child has a sitter or goes to day care, 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 schedule
- Massage additional moisturizer into the affected area if your child starts itching
- Give any medicines prescribed by your doctor

If your child wears diapers, make sure the caregivers follow those instructions as well.

## **When to Call the Doctor**

Please call the Dermatology office if you notice any of the following:

- Your child's skin seems worse even though you are sticking to the skin-care routine
- Your child has signs of a skin infection
- You start your care plan for flare-ups and your child does not get better
- Your child has side effects to any medicines
- You have questions about your child's condition or care

- Dermatology Nurse: 512-628-1920 x4