

ECZEMA

What is eczema?

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a condition that causes dry, itchy, red, scaly skin. It can occur in infants, children, and adults and tends to run in families. Its exact cause is not completely understood, but most people with eczema have dysfunction in the outer layer of their skin (epidermis). Typically infants have involvement of their cheeks and the front of their arms and legs. In children, eczema can affect multiple areas but tends to affect the elbow creases and backs of the knees.

How is it managed?

1. Eliminate triggers

- Wear 100% cotton clothes (avoid wool and other rough fabric)
- Wash clothes with mild, unscented detergent and consider double rinsing
- Avoid fabric softener and dryer sheets
- Try to avoid excessive heat and sweating
- Try to avoid cold, dry air- consider a humidifier in the winter
- Avoid soaps, bubble baths, chlorine, scented moisturizers
- Keep bare skin off the grass if that tends to worsen the eczema

2. Bathing

- Have a shower or bath in lukewarm water every 1-3 days (keep it to less than 10-15 minutes)
- No soaps or bubble baths in the bath water- use a gentle cleanser for dirty areas at the very end of the bath if necessary
- Pat dry after bath and IMMEDIATELY apply moisturizer (see below)
- In some cases, your doctor may recommend a dilute bleach bath to help decrease any bacteria that may be worsening eczema. This is done with ¼ cup of bleach in a full bathtub once or twice a week.

3. Moisturizers

- These should be applied immediately after bathing, before completely drying off to trap the moisture in the skin and avoid having water evaporate, which can be very drying
- In addition to after bath time, these should be applied at least twice a day every day. If you giving your child bath's infrequently, use a warm wash cloth to add moisture to the skin first.
- Glaxal Base or Hydrous Emulsifying Ointment work well, if you find these too greasy, try a fragrance free moisturizer such as Vaseline, Cetaphil, Eucerin, Dove, or Aveeno



4. Prescription creams

- If eczema is not well controlled with the above measures, your doctor may prescribe a cream or ointment
- These may be topical corticosteroids (eg. hydrocortisone, Elocom, Betaderm) or non steroid cream (eg. Elidel, Protopic)
- Apply a thin layer to red, rough, itchy areas as often as prescribed (1-2 times per day), **prior** to the application of moisturizer
- Use consistently until the affected area has responded, then discontinue. But keep using your moisturizer.
- Start using prescription again at the first sign of a flare

5. Control the itch

- Make sure nails are kept short
- If severe, Benadryl can be used to treat itching at night (as it is sedating) to improve sleep and reduce itching. Non sedating antihistamines (eg. Claritin, Alerius, Reactine) can be used during the day