

Atopic Dermatitis (Eczema) & Dry Skin

What Is Eczema

Eczema is a chronic inflammatory disease of the skin, which is typically inherited. Generally eczema is a disease of childhood, but some adults can also be affected.

Factors That Trigger Eczema:

- Allergies: environmental (pollen or pets) or food.
- Irritants: wool, heavy detergents and perfumed soaps.
- Dry skin, which is problematic in Colorado.
- Heat, sweating, and extreme cold.
- Skin infections.

How Can I Avoid Triggering Eczema?

- Wear moisturizer cream/ointment every day.
- Wear sunscreen at all times and avoid prolonged sun exposure.
- Do not scratch—scratching can infect your skin, which will lead to more inflammation.
- Keep fingernails short.
- Wear loose-fitting, cotton clothing.
- Wash new clothes before wearing them.
- Swimming is helpful as long as chlorine is washed off skin immediately and occlusive creams are applied right after.
- Avoid all skin products that contain heavy perfumes or color.
- Avoid lotions, which contain alcohol, and can actually be more drying.

How Do I Treat Eczema?

Soak and Seal

- Don't use bubble bath, scented soaps, or heavily perfumed products.
- Right after bath, lightly pat dry, and then quickly (within 2 minutes) apply cream/ointment based moisturizer to damp skin to “seal” in the hydration.
- Daily “soak” in the tub for 15-20 minutes in warm (not hot) water. For the face, use a wet wash cloth to keep the skin on the face moist.
- Soap and shampoo should be used only during last few minutes of bath.
- **Alternative soak:** **This may be recommended by your Provider depending on the severity of your symptoms** - Use about a half-cup of bleach for a full standard tub. Soak 5 to 10 minutes twice a week.

Products Recommended:

- **Soap:** Unscented –Dove, Aveeno, Alpha Keri, and Vanicream
- **Shampoo:** Johnson's Natural Baby Shampoo, Neutrogena, and Free and Clear.
- **Moisturizers**
 - **Lotions** should be avoided because they contain alcohol, which can actually be more drying to the skin.
 - **Creams:** Vanicream, Eucerin, Cetaphil and Cera Ve
 - **Ointment:** Aquaphor, Vaniply

Medications

Topical Medications:(Steroids, Elidel, Protopic, Atopiclair)

- Apply medicated cream or ointment as prescribed by your doctor.
- Steroids treat the inflammation in the skin.
- Apply evenly and sparingly 1 to 3 times a day to affected areas.
- These medicines usually help in 5 to 7 days.

Potential side effects of long term use of topical steroids:

- Thinning of the skin, loss of skin color, acne and stretch marks.
- Only low dose steroids should be used on the face, neck, groin, and underarm area. (If unsure, check with your physician about using steroid on face.)
- Elidel, Atopiclair, and Protopic are **not** steroids and can be used on all affected areas, including face, neck, underarms and groin.

Oral Medications

- Oral antihistamines may be given to prevent itching—scratching can worsen eczema because it leads to infection and more inflammation.
- Sedating antihistamines may be used at night to help the patient tolerate wet/dry wraps. They also help with itching.

Wet Wraps

- Increase the absorption of topical medication or moisturizer. It helps eczema by reducing itching, cooling and hydrating affected skin.
- After soaking and applying topical medication or moisturizer to the affected skin. Wet wraps should then be applied.
- Put on a pair of wet pajamas or wet long underwear, followed by dry pajamas or a sweat suit; cover the hands and feet with wet cotton tube socks, followed by dry cotton tube socks. Use warm tap water, wring out clothes; do not use dripping wet materials for wet wraps.
- Wet wraps should be worn for 4-6 hours per day or a minimum of 2 hours, 1-2 times a day. This can be done at night while sleeping.

Infections

If your physician suspects the presence of an underlying infection, he/she will sometimes prescribe oral antibiotics to treat this. Eczema can sometimes be very difficult to heal in the presence of infection.

Conclusion

Eczema is a condition that can be frustrating. Treatment programs are time consuming, but they can control the symptoms and help the long-term course of the eczema. It is important to avoid those factors that trigger eczema and to learn as much as possible about the condition. Not all treatments work for everyone and it is important to find the individual treatment plan that works the best for you.

More information regarding eczema can be obtained from: National Eczema Association for Science and Education, 4460 Redwood Hwy, Ste 16-Box D, San Rafael, CA 94903-1953, T. 415-499-3474 F. 415-472-5345
Email: www.nationaleczema.org and www.info@nationaleczema.org