



ATOPIC DERMATITIS/ECZEMA

Atopic dermatitis, also called eczema, is an itchy skin rash that comes and goes, sometimes for no apparent reason, often associated with allergies and asthma. There is no known cure for eczema. Good skin care and medications can help control the itch, and thus prevent or improve the rash. As children get older, eczema may improve. The key to eczema care is to **moisturize frequently** and **target the itch**.

PREVENTION

Moisturize the skin at least twice daily

Eczema causes dry skin with subsequent itching and scratching. For some, this is worse during the winter when the heat is on. The colder it is outside, the drier the air inside will be. For others, the heat of summer is a trigger. To keep the skin in good condition, apply an unscented moisturizing cream or ointment (not lotion) twice daily. Creams are preferred over lotions as they have less additives (which means less stinging) and keep the skin more moist. The best time to apply the moisturizer is immediately after a bath or shower (ideally within 3 minutes of coming out of the bath).

Note: if you are also using a steroid medicine, put it on before applying moisturizer.

Suggestions: Eucerin™, Aveeno™, Aquaphor™, Vaseline™, Cetaphil™, Triple Cream for eczema™, Cerave™.

For severe eczema: Use an ointment to seal in moisture, such as Vaseline™ or Aquaphor™. Ointments sting less than creams on irritated skin.

Use unscented skin cleansers instead of soap

Suggestions: Dove Sensitive Skin™ bar soap, Cetaphil™ cleanser or Aveeno™.

Bathing

Lukewarm daily baths (5-10 min) can help soothe irritated skin and provide moisture to “lock in” with a cream or ointment. On the contrary, some children with eczema benefit from short infrequent baths. Try out both to see which works best for your child.

Bleach baths

One major cause of itching can be bacterial colonization from *Staph aureus*, a common skin bacteria. In order to decrease the itch, plain 6% household bleach can be added to the bath (just like chlorine in a pool). Use one tablespoon per baby bathtub, ¼ cup to a half bathtub, 1/2 cup to full bathtub. RINSE WITH WARM WATER AFTER BLEACH BATHS. Repeat 2-3 times per week. This sounds extreme but works very well!

Wear cotton clothing

Wool or synthetic fabrics may increase itching. As much as possible, have children wear cotton clothing next to the skin. Avoid fleece pajamas or blankets, as these are mostly made of polyester and nylon.

Use an unscented laundry detergent made for sensitive skin and skip the fabric softener and dryer sheets

Suggestions: All Free and Clear™, Trader Joe’s Unscented High Efficiency Detergent™

Keep nails short and as clean as possible

Wet wraps

Apply damp cotton clothing or wraps to itchy skin. In the summer, consider using damp cotton socks with the toes cut off for arm or leg wraps (like a leg warmer). In the winter, consider a layer of damp cotton pjs under a warmer, dry layer at bedtime.

Sunscreen

This is especially important for people with eczema. Use SPF 15 or higher and reapply frequently when outdoors.

Suggestions: active ingredients zinc oxide or titanium dioxide (Badger™, Neutrogena Pure Baby™).

TREATMENT

Topical steroids

Use when skin is itchy, red and rashy. Eczema is called “the itch that rashes”. Apply a thin layer to affected areas twice daily until the itching is resolved. The key is to use liberally what is needed to control the itch, but then stop the steroid cream once the eczema is in good control and the skin appears smooth and no longer itchy. Strong topical steroids (often higher strength prescription steroids) can have side effects if used too long, especially on the face. Commonly, we start with over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream or ointment (0.5-1%) twice daily. If this doesn't improve the rash within a week or so, your child may need a prescription medication. Please call the office for an appointment.

Non-steroidal topical medications

There are some non-steroidal prescription medications available for some patients. See your doctor about this.

Antihistamines

These medications can help to decrease itch as well. Sedating antihistamines, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl™), tend to work best when given at night before bed to help decrease night-time itching. Please see our website for weight-based dosing.

Antibiotics

Sometimes children with eczema can get a skin infection, which can exacerbate the itch. If the rash is red or oozing, start with bleach baths twice daily. Remember to rinse with warm water afterwards. Consider applying topical antibiotics (such as bacitracin or double antibiotic ointment) three times a day. If your child's rash looks especially crusty or weeping, he or she should be examined in the office to see if there is an infection that may require an oral antibiotic.

If you have any questions, please call us at (818) 246-7260 during office hours.

ECZEMA ACTION PLAN:

Eczema under control

Skin is soft, supple, some dryness

- 1) Bathe daily in lukewarm water.
- 2) Apply moisturizer within 3 minutes after bath and again another time daily.
- 3) Avoid fragranced products.

Eczema flare

Itchy skin with redness or rash

- 1) Bathe daily in lukewarm water.
- 2) Apply topical steroid to affected areas immediately after bath and another time daily.
- 3) Apply moisturizer within 3 minutes after bath. Repeat at least twice daily.
- 4) Consider bleach baths.
- 5) Other (see above for details):