

What is eczema?

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a problem causing **dry, red and itchy skin**. Eczema is very common in children. People with eczema have dry, sensitive skin that needs extra protection from irritation. In eczema, there is a flaw in the skin barrier that lets moisture out and can sometimes allow allergens and bacteria in.

What is the usual course for eczema?

Eczema symptoms will come and go, but it is a **chronic skin problem**, so the symptoms **are long-lasting**. Times when the skin gets a little better or clears up completely are called remissions. Times when the symptoms are worse are called exacerbations or **flares**.

How do I prevent flares?

- **Moisturize:**
 - Keep your child's skin moisturized! Moisturizing is the mainstay of your child's **daily** treatment plan.
 - You may need to moisturize **multiple times per day**.
 - Use **fragrance-free** and **dye-free** moisturizers.
 - As a general rule, **the greasier, the better**. Ointments work better than creams. Creams work better than lotion.
- **Bathing:**
 - Keep baths and showers **under 20 minutes** and use **warm** (not hot) water.
 - Use **mild fragrance-free and dye-free cleansers** for bathing and washing hands.
 - After bathing or washing, gently pat skin dry and **while still damp, moisturize** all over. This should be **within 2 minutes** of your child exiting the shower or bath.
 - Avoid bubble baths.

- **Clothing:**
 - Wear **soft fabrics, such as 100% cotton.**
 - Pay attention to those items that touch the skin directly.
 - Avoid polyester or other synthetic fabrics.
 - Remove clothing tags that may irritate the skin.
 - Wash all clothing in **unscented detergent.**
 - Avoid using fabric softeners and dryer sheets.
- **Don't scratch:**
 - Remind your child not to scratch.
 - **Keep fingernails cut short and filed smooth.**
 - Try to distract your child from scratching or keep skin covered.
 - Use medicines for itching if prescribed.

What cleansers and moisturizers should I use?

Here are a few examples of brands we have found work well. You may have to try several before you find one that works best for you. **Avoid products with colors or perfumes.**

- **Daily moisturizers:**

○ Vaseline®	○ Eucerin®
○ Neutrogena®	○ CeraVe®
○ Vani Cream®	○ Aquaphor®
○ Mustela®	○ Aveeno®
- **Mild cleansers:**

○ Dove®	○ Neutrogena®
○ Cetaphil®	○ Oil of Olay®

What medications should I use during a flare?

Ask your doctor before using steroids or antihistamines. **Topical steroids** are creams or ointments that have steroid medication in them to treat the skin inflammation directly.

- These reduce pain, itching, redness and swelling

- Your doctor may prescribe them in a “**burst and taper**” with instructions such as “use twice daily for two weeks and then no more than two days per week.” This is to prevent thinning of skin, stretch marks, or acne that may occur if it is used for long periods.
 - Over the counter:
 - 1% hydrocortisone
 - Commonly Prescribed:
 - 2.5% hydrocortisone
 - 0.05% desonide
 - 0.1% triamcinolone

Oral antihistamines are medications taken by mouth to reduce itching by blocking the histamine process in an allergic reaction.

- Over the counter:
 - Benadryl®
 - Claritin®
 - Zyrtec®
- Prescribed:
 - Hydroxyzine

When should I call my doctor?

You should see your doctor if the eczema looks infected (blisters, weeping fluid, raised areas, spreading redness, fevers). Areas where the skin was scratched are often the sites of infection. You should also call your doctor if the medications your doctor prescribes are not helping, or if there is no response to a steroid treatment after one week.

Additional resources:

National Eczema Association

<http://www.nationaleczema.org>

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology

<http://www.aaaai.org>

American Academy of Dermatology

<http://www.aad.org>

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by the University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by UMHS and for which UMHS does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Authors: Margeaux Reizian MD, Stephanie Booms MD
Reviewer: Alison Lea Dickson, MD, Ruti Volk, MSI, AHIP

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health System](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 01/2015