



**CHU
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Living with Eczema

A practical guide to help you understand
eczema and better treat it



What is eczema?

Eczema (atopic dermatitis) is a chronic skin condition that presents as inflammatory flare-ups. During the flare-ups, the skin is red and dry, and it itches.

In children with eczema, the skin barrier (surface) doesn't work well. Their skin has difficulty maintaining moisture, and it becomes drier and has a reduced level of protection. Allergens (dust mites, for example), bacteria or irritants (perfumes, for example) can then cross the skin barrier and cause eczema flare-ups. The skin is very itchy and turns red.

Usually, eczema flare-ups become less common as time goes by, but the skin remains sensitive throughout life. You cannot cure eczema, but you can control it. The secret to living well with eczema is to take care of your skin everyday.

The benefits of eczema treatment

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- ✓ Strengthens and protects the skin barrier.
- ✓ Reduces redness, itching and scratching.
- ✓ Increases the length of time the skin is normal and reduces the frequency and severity of future eczema flare-ups.
- ✓ Prevents infection.

Optimal treatment

The optimal treatment for eczema consists of:

1. Moisturizing the skin well with a cream, ointment or lotion;
2. Treating the eczema (red, dry skin that itches);
3. Relieving itching and avoiding scratching;
4. Preventing infection;
5. Identifying triggers (irritants, dust mites, animals, pollen, tobacco, temperature changes and emotions) and avoiding them.

Each of these five elements is essential to controlling the disease.

1. Moisturizing the skin well

Moisturizing the skin acts as a protection and helps to keep water inside of it. Here is the best way to proceed.

- ✓ Have your child take a lukewarm bath or shower for a maximum of five to ten minutes daily (*unless otherwise directed by your doctor*). Do not add any products to the water. If the bath or shower hurts the skin, it can be taken every other day.
- ✓ Use a mild, unscented cleanser (bar or liquid).
- ✓ After bathing or showering, gently dab the skin with a towel to dry; do not rub.
- ✓ Immediately after bathing, apply a moisturizer product to damp skin.

The best moisturizer is one that is unscented, made for sensitive or eczematous skin, and one that you and your child prefer. There are several choices available, and your doctor, pharmacist or nurse can help you find the right one for you.

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Tips and tricks

For infants and toddlers

Make the moisturizer application pleasant for your child. In a calm atmosphere, massage gently. Relaxation will help control eczema better.

For older children

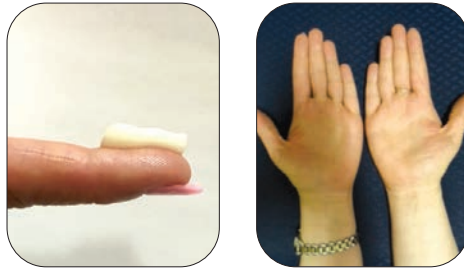
Aim to have the child apply the moisturizer himself. Post an application schedule and give rewards for following the schedule. The more your child participates in his care, the more he will feel he is in control of his illness.

2. Treating the eczema

The red patches (inflammation) on your child's skin are treated with an anti-inflammatory product that your doctor prescribed.

- ✓ Apply the anti-eczema treatment(s) where the skin is red or thick once or twice a day, as directed by your doctor.
- ✓ Apply the anti-eczema treatment(s) before applying the moisturizer.
- ✓ Wait for the skin to regain its normal appearance before stopping the anti-eczema treatment(s).
- ✓ As soon as the skin becomes slightly pink or red again, start applying the anti-eczema treatment(s) as prescribed

The amount of product applied on the index finger should cover an area of eczematous skin equivalent to the two palms of an adult's hands.



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3. Relieving itching and avoiding scratching

Scratching the skin damages it and makes it even more sensitive, which increases the itching. This is the «vicious circle» of eczema. Relieving the itching reduces your child's stress, helps them sleep better, and prevents scratching. Here are a few tips:

- ✓ Apply a cool damp towel to itchy skin.
- ✓ Keep moisturizing or medicated products in the refrigerator as coolness will soothe the skin.
- ✓ Keep your child's hands occupied with games and activities he enjoys.
- ✓ Give your child anti-itch medications (in syrup or pill form) nightly, 30 minutes before bedtime, and during the day as needed.

4. Preventing infection

Eczema and the sores caused by scratching make the skin more likely to be infected with germs. By following these tips, you will prevent infection.

- ✓ Always wash your hands before applying the product.
- ✓ Keep your child's nails short and clean.
- ✓ If the moisturizer or medicated product is in a large container, scoop it out with a clean spoon to avoid contaminating the whole container.

If the skin becomes very damaged, hotter, redder, painful or swollen, or is oozing yellow pus, consult a doctor. The skin may be infected and, in that case, your child needs an antibiotic in the form of a cream or a prescription taken by mouth.

5. Identifying triggers

6 Stay a step ahead of your child's eczema flare-ups by identifying the triggers, which can be caused by:

- ✓ Irritants;
- ✓ Dust mites, pollen and animal hair;
- ✓ Extreme temperatures, sweating, or dry winter air in the house;
- ✓ Stress and emotions.

••• **DIY idea** •••

••• Draw an eye-catching poster that reminds your child of the triggers that most affect his eczema (for example, dust mites, heat, cats, an argument with a sibling, a test). •••

Habits to adopt to avoid eczema triggers

Irritants

- ✓ Choose a mild, unscented cleanser for the bath or shower. Avoid shampoos (or other hair products) in the bathtub, as they are irritating. Avoid bubble bath products.
- ✓ Wash clothes with laundry soap without fabric softeners and rinse well. Do not add fabric softener to the dryer.
- ✓ Choose soft clothing (satin cotton, for example) rather than rough clothing (such as wool or nylon).
- ✓ Pay attention to cleaning products that could irritate the skin.
- ✓ Keep your house smoke-free.

Dust mites, animals and pollen

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- ✓ Avoid having carpets in your home and choose toys that are easy to clean.
- ✓ Use washable duvets and pillows, rather than those made of feathers.
- ✓ When there is a lot of pollen outside, dry your laundry indoors.
- ✓ Keep the house clean and dust-free, and avoid furry or feathered animals.

Extreme temperatures and perspiration

- ✓ Opt for a lukewarm bath or shower. Water that is too hot causes itching.
- ✓ Keep the temperature of the house cool (at around 19 degrees Celsius).
- ✓ Keep the house humidity at 30% to 45% in winter.
- ✓ Do activities indoors when it is too cold or too hot outside.
- ✓ Choose loose, light clothes.
- ✓ Encourage your child to do physical activities that he tolerates well.
- ✓ Invite your child to take a shower or a lukewarm bath after physical activity or swimming.

Tip

Children with eczema may be questioned by their peers or teased. Help your child understand his illness and how to explain it to its friends. If he is teased, he will be able to react better.

Stress and emotions

Stress and emotions can aggravate eczema. In difficult situations, help your child to verbalize or illustrate what he is feeling about his eczema through art or pictures.

In short

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- ✓ Eczema means that the skin is a little more fragile and requires a little more time and attention. Eczema cannot be cured, but it can be controlled very well. By understanding eczema better, it can be better treated and life can be enjoyed to the fullest.
- ✓ Use the following action plan as a reminder of the steps to take, depending on the stage of the eczema.
- ✓ If you have questions or concerns, do not hesitate to talk to your doctor or nurse about them.

My action plan



Green light • To protect my skin at all times

- ✓ I take a lukewarm bath or shower for about five minutes every day (or every other day if it irritates my skin).
- ✓ I use a mild cleanser at the end of my bath or shower only on the areas of my body that need to be cleaned.
- ✓ I apply a moisturizer on my damp skin immediately after bathing.





Yellow light • The eczema returns

Red, dry, itchy skin

- ✓ I apply my anti-eczema treatment(s) on the affected skin once or twice a day before my moisturizer.
- ✓ I wait for my skin to regain its normal appearance before stopping the anti-eczema treatment(s).
- ✓ If there is no improvement after using the anti-eczema treatment(s) for three weeks, I follow the recommendations under «Red light».
- ✓ I use my medication that reduces itching every evening and during the day as needed.

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Red Light • The eczema increases

Red Light • The eczema increases

- ✓ For two to three days, I apply anti-eczema treatment(s) to my red skin. I then cover my skin with a wet piece of clothing or a compress for 30 minutes. Then I apply my moisturizer.
- ✓ I consult my doctor if the eczema symptoms are still increasing despite the wet compresses.



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In short

- ✓ After proper treatment, eczema improves. However, it is normal for eczema to return. In that case, the recommendations of the action plan must be repeated.

The skin seems infected

**Painful, swollen, crusty skin
oozing yellow pus**

- ✓ I apply an antibiotic cream or ointment twice a day to the crusty areas.
- ✓ I consult my doctor if the crusty areas increase despite my antibiotic cream or ointment, as an antibiotic drug taken by mouth may be necessary.
- ✓ I stop applying my anti-eczema treatment(s) to the infected skin.



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Eczema Foundation

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