

## Eczema

Eczema (ECK-zem-uh), or atopic dermatitis, is a chronic dry itchy skin condition that runs in families. Eczema is not contagious. Dry, rough patches of eczema can come and go. We cannot cure eczema, but can help control it.

Eczema often affects the insides of elbows, backs of knees, and the face, but can cover the entire body. During flare-ups, seeping or crusted sores may develop. Eczema is not caused by allergens, but because the skin is so sensitive, some things can make it worse. These include very hot or cold temperatures, dry air, scents or preservatives in skin care items and wool clothes. Keep a diary of things that seem to trigger flare-ups of your child's eczema.

Itching is a symptom of eczema that is very challenging. Itching can make your child irritable and can lead to a skin infection if scratching leads to open sores. There are a few things you can do to reduce skin irritation.

### How to Help Reduce Itching

- Avoid wool clothing and blankets, since some children are sensitive to wool. Soft, washable cottons should be worn.
- Wearing long sleeves, long pants or one-piece outfits will help keep your child from scratching exposed skin.
- Heat and sweating will increase the itching. Avoid over-dressing your child, especially during cold weather.
- Give your child smooth, washable toys and smooth, rather than furry, stuffed animals.
- Hot water and soap cause dry skin. When giving a bath, use lukewarm water. Do not put any soap in the bath water. Only use a small amount of soap at the end of the bath. Perfumed soaps should not be used. Use a mild soap or skin cleanser, such as Aveeno<sup>®</sup>, Cerave<sup>®</sup>, Cetaphil<sup>®</sup>, Dove<sup>®</sup> for Sensitive Skin or Vanicream<sup>®</sup> (Picture 1).



**Picture 1** Do not use hot water or perfumed soap for baths.

## How to Help Reduce Itching, continued

- Apply a thick, bland moisturizer to your child's skin within 3 minutes of bathing. You can apply bland moisturizers several times a day. A moisturizer such as Aquaphor<sup>®</sup>, Aveeno<sup>®</sup> Cream, Cerave<sup>®</sup> Cream, Cetaphil<sup>®</sup> Cream, Eucerin<sup>®</sup> Cream, Vanicream<sup>®</sup> or Vaseline<sup>®</sup> works well.
- Keep your child's fingernails and toenails clean and cut short to keep the child from scratching and causing infections.
- Wash all clothes and bed linens in a mild detergent. Rinse twice to remove detergent.

## Nutrition

- Follow your doctor's advice if certain foods are to be avoided. If you need help with menu planning, a dietitian can provide special recipes and teach you how to read food labels.
- Inform your child's school, day care or baby-sitter if certain foods are to be avoided.
- If you notice your child's eczema is worse when certain foods are eaten, avoid these foods and contact your child's doctor.



**Picture 2** Playing games will help your child forget about the itching.

## Activity

- Provide large toys your child can handle if hands and fingers are affected.
- Set aside time to read and play with your child. Playing with games and toys will help keep his or her mind off the itching (Picture 2).
- When eczema flares up, your child should avoid any activity or exercise which may cause sweating and increased itching.

## Medicine

- If your doctor prescribes a medicated cream or ointment, apply it in a thin layer to the raised, rough, itchy areas of eczema only.
- Putting on too much ointment or applying it more often than prescribed will not help the eczema and can cause side effects.
- Medicines are prescribed based on the location and thickness of the eczema, so you may have more than one kind of medicine. Follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

## Medicine, continued

- Do not use a non-prescription, medicated cream or ointment unless your child's doctor suggests it. Some of these ointments can be harmful to babies and young children.
- Be careful not to get any ointment in your child's eyes.
- You can apply a bland moisturizer over the prescription medicines. Continue to apply moisturizer to all skin including areas without eczema. Keeping all skin as healthy as possible with a good moisturizer will help your child's eczema overall.

## Discipline

Your child should have limits set and be disciplined the same as any other child. He should be allowed to play as much as possible.

## When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor if:

- Your child has severe itching that is interfering with sleep.
- Your child's skin looks like it is infected (has redness on all of his/her skin, has many open sores on the skin, has drainage from skin sores, or develops fevers with skin sores).

## Follow-Up Appointments

Your doctor will decide when you should make a follow-up appointment.

Remember, eczema is a chronic skin problem that may require doctor's visits for several years.

Your follow-up appointment is on (date) \_\_\_\_\_ at (time) \_\_\_\_\_.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your child's doctor or nurse, or call \_\_\_\_\_.