



CARING FOR ECZEMA AND DRY SKIN

What is eczema?

Eczema is an inherited skin condition where the person is susceptible to developing irritated red dry itchy patches of skin. The reddish color which signals inflammation and irritation makes eczema different from simple dry skin. Eczema patches can develop anywhere on the body, but typically they are seen on the face, on the arms and legs, in the neck folds, in the arm creases and behind the knees. It is a condition that tends to flare up periodically but is present lifelong. The key to treatment is to keep it controlled and minimize the flare ups.

How is eczema treated?

There are two goals for eczema treatment- hydrating the skin and reducing the inflammation.

Hydration

Many people think that bathing their children less frequently will reduce drying. Dermatologists believe daily bathing is beneficial in eczema because it reduces the amount of bacteria on the skin. In reality, baths can be very hydrating to the skin provided a few guidelines are followed:

1. Keep baths brief, typically less than 10 minutes.
2. Keep water temperature lukewarm, not too hot.
3. Allow children to play first in clean water and then soap and rinse them. If your child has sensitive skin, using no soap cleaners may be helpful.
4. Immediately following a bath, the child should be lightly toweled off leaving the skin damp.
5. Then the child should be covered with a good skin moisturizer within 2 minutes of coming out of the bath. We recommend that parents keep the moisturizer right by the bathtub.
6. Follow this with an ointment in problem areas or your steroid treatment if in flares.

It is important to use a good hydrating skin cream. Many of the available lotions have a high-water content making them poor hydrating agents. In general, creams moisturize the skin better than lotions. We recommend using some of the heavier moisturizing creams such as Cetaphil or Cera Ve. Vaseline and Aquaphor are great ointments that are inexpensive. Some parent use these at night before bed when greasy skin is not as much of an issue. Children with eczema need to have their skin moisturized at least twice a day.

Reducing inflammation

When the skin becomes red and inflamed, it is beyond a moisturizer. A topical steroid or other inflammation-reducing cream is necessary. Depending on the severity of your child's eczema, your doctor will either recommend using over-the-counter 1% hydrocortisone or will prescribe a prescription strength medication. It is best to apply the inflammation reducing cream once or twice a day (depending on the recommendation of your doctor) and then moisturize over it with a cream or ointment. A general rule of thumb is that topical steroids should not be used for more than 1-2 weeks at a time. If at that point the skin is not improving, you

should consult your doctor. Applying a steroid cream on the skin for a prolonged period of time can cause damage to the skin. In addition, avoid using steroid creams on areas of the body that will be completely covered up immediately. For example, if you are using a steroid cream in the diaper area, allow the area to be air exposed for 10-15 minutes before putting the diaper on.

When should I bring my child in to be seen for their eczema?

When your child has a flare of their eczema, begin using the inflammation reducing cream recommended by your doctor. Continue to moisturize over it. If after 1 week the skin is not improved or if it appears to be worsening, call for an appointment. If your child develops a fever or very red tender skin patches, it could be a sign of infection and you should see your doctor immediately

Is there anything else I can do to treat an eczema flare?

It is important to control the amount of scratching your child does. Scratching actually increases inflammation and perpetuates a flare. It also increases the chance of a secondary infection because dirt and bacteria live under fingernails. Prompt treatment of red patches with steroid creams is important. You can also give your child Benadryl at night to reduce the amount that they scratch in their sleep. Longer pajamas that cover the itchy areas are often helpful.