

Managing your eczema (atopic dermatitis) - leaflet for children and parents

Children's Development Centre

Information for Patients

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What is eczema?

Eczema is a condition where skin on parts of your body becomes red, dry and itchy. There are different types of eczema.



What causes eczema?

It usually runs in families, and you may also have asthma, hay fever or other allergies. This is then sometimes called 'atopic eczema' (or 'atopic dermatitis') which just means there is a link with allergies.

It can be made worse by things around you. It's important to know what these are and how to look after your skin if your eczema gets bad.



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What can I do to help control my eczema?

- Apply moisturisers (emollients) every day.
- Use a topical steroid cream/ ointment given by your doctor on flared areas.
- Avoid things which can make your eczema worse (we call these 'triggers').

What are emollients and how should I apply them?



Emollients are a type of moisturiser that can be used every day. They help to keep moisture in your skin and help with healing. They come in different forms like lotions, creams and ointments.

They are applied all over the body, at least twice each day.

The best time to use emollients is after having a shower/ bath.

Make sure you apply it in the direction your hair grows.

Even if your skin looks normal, it is still important to apply the emollient in all areas where you might get eczema.



You can prevent your eczema from getting worse by applying an emollient every day using the guidance above.

If you are running out, remember to contact your GP for another prescription!



What are topical steroid creams/ ointments and how should I apply them?

‘Topical’ means something that you apply directly to the skin.



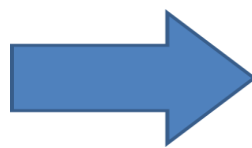
Like emollients, they also come in different forms like a cream or ointment, but they contain steroid medicine. The medicine helps to reduce inflammation and itching when your eczema gets worse.

They can have different strengths, depending on how bad your eczema is.

Ointments are slightly different from creams. They are greasier and help moisturise the skin more.

It is important to apply topical steroids properly. Putting too much on can be harmful as it can make your skin thinner. A good way to measure the amount you need is by using ‘finger tip units (FTU)’.

1 FTU is from the tip of an adult finger to the first bend in the finger. This amount is enough to cover an area the size of 2 adult hands (palms and fingers) held together.



Only apply topical steroids on areas which are affected. Usually, it is applied twice a day but your doctor will tell you exactly how many times you need to apply it.

Your doctor will tell you how long to keep applying a topical steroid for. As your eczema gets better, your doctor may reduce the strength or tell you to apply it less often. Topical steroids should be stopped once your eczema has settled down.

You can apply emollients and topical steroids in any order, but just make sure to wait at least 15 minutes between applications.

What can I do to stop my eczema from getting worse?



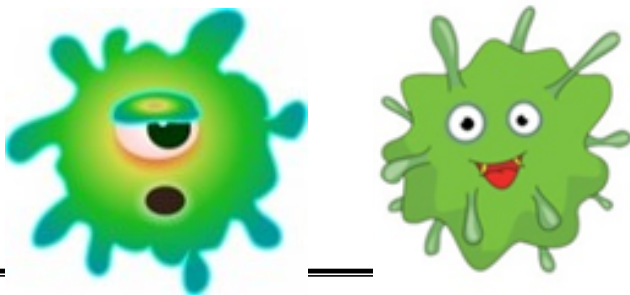
Make sure when you shower the water is warm, not hot. This stops your skin from becoming too dry.



Try not to use any soaps when washing your body, as they can dry the skin. This includes bubble baths and shampoos. Use products specially designed for people with eczema.



Avoid freshly cut grass and flowers. Pollen can make your eczema worse.



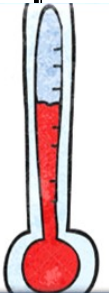
Infection from colds and other viruses may cause eczema to become more inflamed and weepy and may need treatment with antibiotics. The cold sore virus can infect eczema so try to avoid direct contact with cold sores.



Some people react to animal fur and contact with cats, dogs and horses. Pets are not recommended. If you already have a pet keep them out of the bedroom, especially at night.



Heat can make things worse so light clothing is best, for example cotton. Some fabrics such as wool or nylon may make eczema worse.

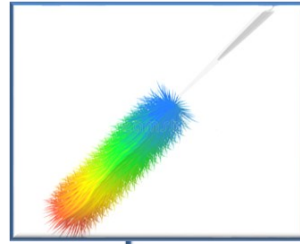


Make sure your bedroom is cool when you sleep. Dry air will dry the skin out and humid environments increase growth of mould and house dust mite.

Use cotton bed sheets, duvet covers and pillow cases and wash/change weekly to stop bacteria spreading!

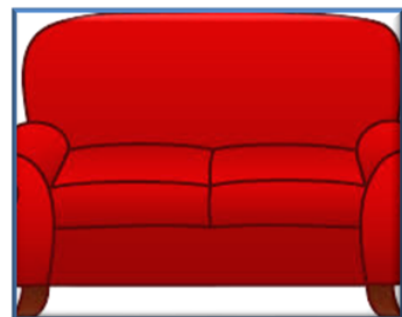


Use a non-bio washing powder and avoid fabric conditioners. Wash clothes at a high temperature to kill any dust mites.



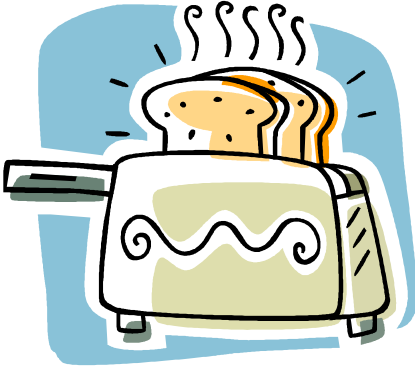
Dust can make eczema worse. Vacuum carpets regularly especially around skirting boards.

When cleaning use a damp duster or mop to avoid making dust airborne.



Vacuum soft furnishings regularly.

If you're buying new furniture, think about buying one made out of leather. They are better for your skin because they hold less dust and are easier to clean.



Food allergies - in a small number of people their eczema may be affected by some foods. You can keep a food diary to try and identify things that may be a trigger, and discuss this with your doctor.

Remember, there is no cure for eczema, but for most children it clears up or gets a lot better as they get older. However, it is important to take good care of your skin every day and to avoid things that could make your eczema worse!



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