

Atopic Dermatitis commonly known as *eczema*

What do we know about it?

- It runs in families. It's also associated with other atopic disorders like asthma, hay fever, and food allergies. So, for example, if one person in the family has asthma, the risk of atopic dermatitis in any family member is higher.
- Many believe the problem arises from the skin's inability to keep itself moist; there is also an association with allergies.

How to prevent it?

- You can't totally prevent it.
- To decrease your child's chances of getting it (if atopy runs in the family) breast-feed, go slowly on introducing solids during the first year of life, and avoid perfumes, harsh detergents, soaps, and chemicals against his or her skin.

How to treat it?

- This is a life long tendency of the skin, so it is something one has for life. But one can control its severity.
- Get rid of any harsh soaps, detergents, and lotions. In real bad cases dermatologists recommend avoiding soap all together, except for the diaper areas and later underarms/feet.
- To help the skin stay moisturized, dermatologists recommend water baths, twice a day to every other day (the worse the atopic dermatitis, the more frequent the baths). At the end of the bath, your hypoallergenic soap can be used on your child, but don't let him or her sit in soap water.
- Immediately after the bath, he or she should be dabbed dry and gooped up from head to toe. The ointments used should be hypoallergenic as well.
- If your child develops atopic dermatitis during the first year of life, food could be the culprit. Stop what you have most recently introduced and see what happens.
- If your child's skin doesn't respond to the above, then we have to start anti-inflammatory creams or ointments, such as hydrocortisone, triamcinolone, elecon, aclovent, etc. on the irritated areas. The weaker creams are the only ones we can use on the face. The general approach is to start with the weakest creams and make it more potent if there is no response. Similar to asthma an acute flare is attacked aggressively, but similar to asthma the medications are withdrawn quickly as the flare subsides. Also like asthma, minimizing triggers and preventing aggravation are the main stay of treatment.

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Which are the hypoallergenic items?

- They are usually advertised as such. The soaps, with which we have had success, are Dove soap (sensitive skin), Neutrogena, Cetaphil and Baby Magic (hypoallergenic). The ointments we usually recommend are Eucerin cream, Keri lotion, lubriderm or good old petroleum jelly. Detergents which are usually OK are Ivory Snow or Dreft.

Which food could be allergenic?

- Cow's milk, soy, egg whites, citrus, chocolate, strawberries, wheat, tomatoes and avacado, but any food which consistently causes a rash should be eliminated from the diet. Shellfish and nuts are usually severe allergens and the allergic response to them is not usually limited to eczema.