

Atopic Dermatitis aka 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. Therefore, we focus so much on moisturizing the skin, to keep it intact and prevent cracking/breaking open. This can then result in skin infections as the skin opens to allow for bacteria or viruses to enter. For many with eczema or atopic dermatitis, there is also an association with allergies. These allergic triggers can be due to food or environmental triggers. However, children generally need exposure to 2-3 seasons for a seasonal allergy to be responsible.

How to prevent eczema?

- You can't totally prevent it! With a combination of frequent bathing and moisturizing with thick ointments.
- To decrease your child's chances of getting it (if atopy runs in the family), breast feed and go slowly on introducing solids during the first year of life. Foods should be introduced over a few days at a time. Please ask us how to introduce new foods as there are many details that go into this process.
- Avoid perfumes, harsh detergents, soaps, and chemicals against your child's skin. Lavender, citrus, and eucalyptus are common offenders.

How to treat eczema?

- This is a lifelong tendency of the skin, so it is something one has for life. However, you can control the severity of it and its impact on your life.
- Remove any harsh soaps, detergents, fabric softeners, or lotions. In very severe cases, dermatologists recommend avoiding soap entirely and only doing daily water baths. Sometimes, they encourage water baths up to twice daily. At the end of the bath, hypoallergenic soap can be applied to dirty areas, but this way they do not soak in the soap suds which can dry the skin more. Generally, soap is not needed in sensitive areas like the diaper area as this is a common cause of irritation.
- Immediately after a bath, your child should be dabbed dry, rather than rubbed with a towel as friction can be irritating to sensitive skin. Then once they are dry, they can be "gooped" up from head to toe. The ointments used should be

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hypoallergenic as well. If a child is in an active eczema flare, topical steroids can be applied directly to the skin after a bath and the regular ointment is then applied after.

- 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. It is essential to determine which food is causing the reaction.
- If your child's skin doesn't respond to the above, then we must start anti-inflammatory creams or ointments, such as hydrocortisone, triamcinolone, elecon, aclovent, etc. on irritated areas. Over the counter hydrocortisone is the only cream we can use on the face. Other products are too strong and may lead to thinning of the skin. 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 treated aggressively, and the medications are withdrawn quickly as the flare subsides. The goal is to minimize triggers and prevent aggravation or future flares.

What does hypoallergenic mean?

- Hypoallergenic means unlikely to cause an allergic reaction or response. These are sensitive skin friendly items!

Which are the hypoallergenic products?

- They are usually advertised as such. The soaps, with which we have had success, are Dove soap (sensitive skin), Neutrogena, Cetaphil, Aveeno, CeraVe, Vanicream and Baby Magic (hypoallergenic). The ointments we usually recommend are Eucerin cream, Lubriderm, Aveeno, CeraVe, Vanicream or good old petroleum jelly. Detergents which are usually OK are dye free, scent free products such as Dreft. They also offer many brands with free and clear products.
- We do NOT recommend Honest Company or Johnson and Johnson products as we have observed a trend between patients who use these products and those with persistent eczema flares.
- Any lavender product is NOT recommended for sensitive skin. Oatmeal products, however, are generally soothing and often provide itch relief.

Which food could be allergenic or causing eczema?

- Cow's milk, soy, egg whites, citrus, chocolate, strawberries, wheat, tomatoes, and avocado, 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.