

700 Children's Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43205-2696
nationwidechildrens.org

ECZEMA

Eczema (ECK-zem-uh), or atopic dermatitis, is a dry itchy skin disease that runs in families. It usually affects the insides of elbows, back of knees, and the face, but can cover the entire body. During flare-ups, seeping or crusted sores may develop. This is not contagious. 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, high humidity, and wearing wool clothes. Keep a diary of things that seem to trigger flare-ups of your child's eczema.

Itching is one symptom that is hard for parents to deal with. It not only makes your child irritable, but can lead to a skin infection if the sore areas are scratched. 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, high humidity, 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. Perfumed soaps or deodorants should not be used. Avoid using too much soap. Your child's doctor may recommend a specific type of soap or skin cleanser, such as Dove Unscented, Basis, or Cetaphil.
- Apply a cool compress. (Dampen a soft cloth with cool water and hold it on the skin.)
- Apply a moisturizer to the skin about 5 minutes after bathing. Check with your doctor for the type to use.
- 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.
- To prevent sunburn, limit the amount of time your child is in direct sunlight.



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

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. A child who has eczema sometimes has a poor appetite. Forcing him to eat is not a good idea. He should be given little rewards for eating as much as he can. Meals should be planned for times when your child is rested.
- Call 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.

ACTIVITY

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

MEDICINE

- If your doctor prescribes an ointment, apply it **thinly** to the skin.
- Use an amount that is just enough to cover the affected area. Putting on too much ointment or applying it more often than prescribed will not help the eczema and can cause side effects.
- Do not use a non-prescription 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 the child's eyes.
- Moisturizers may help soothe dry skin.
- Follow your doctor's instructions carefully.



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

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 YOUR DOCTOR

Call your doctor if:

- Your child is not getting enough sleep.
- The skin looks like it is infected (has drainage from skin sores or is reddened).
- Your child runs a fever over 101°F for 6 to 12 hours.
- The itching is severe.

FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS

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

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or your nurse, or call _____.