

Eczema: Tips on How to Care for Your Skin

What is eczema?

Eczema is a general term for rash-like skin conditions. The most common type of eczema is called atopic dermatitis, which is an allergic reaction. Eczema is often very itchy and when you scratch it, the skin becomes red and inflamed. As many as 15 million people in the United States have some form of eczema. It occurs in adults and children, but most often appears on babies. You are more likely to have eczema if you have a family history of the condition.

Although the exact cause is unknown, eczema is not contagious. Eczema can't be cured, but it can be managed, and you can learn to avoid the things that trigger it.

Limit your contact with things that can irritate your skin.

Some things that may irritate your skin include household cleansers, detergents, aftershave lotions, soap, gasoline, turpentine and other solvents. Try to avoid contact with things that make you break out with eczema. Because soaps and wetness can cause skin irritation, wash your hands only when necessary, especially if you have eczema on your hands. Be sure to dry your hands completely after you wash them.

Wear gloves to protect the skin on your hands.

Wear vinyl or plastic gloves for work that requires you to have your hands in water. Also, wear gloves when your hands will be exposed to anything that can irritate your skin. Wear cotton gloves under plastic gloves to soak up sweat from your hands. Take occasional breaks and remove your gloves to prevent a buildup of sweat inside your gloves.

Wear gloves when you go outside during the winter. Cold air and low humidity can dry your skin, and dryness can make your eczema worse.

Wear clothes made of cotton or a cotton blend.

Wool and some synthetic fabrics can irritate your skin. Most people with sensitive skin feel better in clothes made of cotton or a cotton blend.

Care for your skin in the bath or shower.

Bathe only with a mild soap, such as Dove, Basis or Oil of Olay. Use a small amount of soap when bathing. Keep the water temperature cool or warm, not hot. Soaking in the tub for a short time can be good for your skin because the skin's outer layer can absorb water and become less dry. Soak for 15 to 20 minutes. Then use a

soft towel to pat your skin dry without rubbing. Immediately after drying, apply a moisturizer to your skin. This helps seal in the moisture.

Use the medicine your doctor has prescribed for you.

When your eczema flares up (gets worse), use the medicine prescribed by your doctor. Use it right after bathing. Medicine used to treat eczema is usually a steroid medicine that you rub on your skin. Follow your doctor's directions for using this medicine or check the label for proper use. Call your doctor if your skin does not get better after 3 weeks of using the medicine.

Use a moisturizer on your skin every day.

Moisturizers help keep your skin soft and flexible. They prevent skin cracks. A plain moisturizer is best. Avoid moisturizers with fragrances (perfume) and a lot of extra ingredients. A good, cheap moisturizer is plain petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline). Use moisturizers that are more greasy than creamy, because creams usually have more preservatives in them.

Regular use of a moisturizer can help prevent the dry skin that is common in winter.

Avoid scratching or rubbing the itchy area.

Try not to scratch the irritated area on your skin even if it itches. Scratching can break the skin. Bacteria can enter these breaks and cause infection. Moisturizing your skin will help prevent itchiness.

Avoid getting too hot and sweaty.

Too much heat and sweat can make your skin more irritated and itchy. Try to avoid activities that make you hot and sweaty.

Learn how to manage stress in your life.

Eczema can flare up when you are under stress. Learn how to recognize and cope with stress. Stress reduction techniques can help. Changing your activities to reduce daily stress can also be helpful.

Continue skin care even after your skin has healed.

The area where you had the eczema may easily get irritated again, so it needs special care. Continue to follow the tips in this handout even after your skin has healed.

Special Instructions:

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