Eczema / Atopic Dermatitis

Atopic dermatitis, or eczema, is an inherited type of sensitive skin. Often people with eczema have a family history of allergies, asthma, or hay fever. It causes a red itchy rash and dry scaly skin. The itchiness may occur before the skin rash and may be very intense. It is not contagious. Eczema is generally worse during the cooler winter months and often improves with the warmth of summer. Eczema usually starts showing signs in infancy. Some children outgrow eczema, but it may last through adulthood. Flare-ups may be caused by:

- Eating something or contact with something you are sensitive or allergic to.
- Stress.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of eczema is usually based upon symptoms and medical history.

TREATMENT

Eczema cannot be cured, but symptoms usually can be controlled with treatment or avoidance of *allergens* (things to which you are sensitive or allergic to).

- Controlling the itching and scratching.
  - Use over-the-counter antihistamines as directed for itching. It is especially useful at night when the itching tends to be worse.
  - Use over-the-counter steroid creams as directed for itching.
  - Scratching makes the rash and itching worse and may cause *impetigo* (a skin infection) if fingernails are contaminated (dirty).
- Keeping the skin well moisturized with creams every day. This will seal in moisture and help prevent dryness. Lotions containing alcohol and water can dry the skin and are not recommended.
- Limiting exposure to allergens.
- Recognizing situations that cause stress.
- Developing a plan to manage stress.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take prescription and over-the-counter medicines as directed by your caregiver.
- Do not use anything on the skin without checking with your caregiver.
- Keep baths or showers short (5 minutes) in warm (not hot) water. Use mild cleansers for bathing. You may add non-perfumed bath oil to the bath water. It is best to avoid soap and bubble bath.
- Immediately after a bath or shower, when the skin is still damp, apply a moisturizing ointment to the entire body. This ointment should be a petroleum ointment. This will seal in moisture and help prevent dryness. The thicker the ointment the better. These should be unscented.
- Keep fingernails cut short and wash hands often. If your child has eczema, it may be necessary to put soft gloves or mittens on your child at night.
- Dress in clothes made of cotton or cotton blends. Dress lightly, as heat increases itching.
- Avoid foods that may cause flare-ups. Common foods include cow's milk, peanut butter, eggs and wheat.
- Keep a child with eczema away from anyone with fever blisters. The virus that causes fever blisters (herpes simplex) can cause a serious skin infection in children with eczema.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Itching interferes with sleep.
- The rash gets worse or is not better within one week following treatment.
- The rash looks infected (pus or soft yellow scabs).
- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102º F (38.9º C).
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 100.5º F (38.1º C) or higher for more than 1 day.
- The rash flares up after contact with someone who has fever blisters.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your baby is older than 3 months or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**

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