

Atopic Dermatitis – Atopic Eczema

This is a fairly common skin problem. Any area of the body may be affected. The skin is frequently **dry, red, rough or scaly and itchy**. Itch can be severe, and you may find yourself scratching or rubbing while awake, or even when sleeping. Affected individuals may also be prone to allergies, runny nose or asthma. The eruptions typically occur on the elbow bends and backs of the knees, ankles and wrists and on the face, neck and upper chest.

The skin is very sensitive. Its normal protective barrier is disrupted. The rash may therefore be easily irritated by everyday substances such as soaps, detergents, fragrances, hot water, and rough fabrics.

The condition usually improves with time. However, it can come and go throughout life. These cases can cause frustration to both the patient and the health care provider.

Since this condition is associated with allergies, can certain foods be the cause?

Yes, but only rarely (perhaps 10 percent). Although some foods may provoke attacks, especially in infants and young children, eliminating them rarely will bring about lasting improvement or a cure. If all else fails, foods such as cow's milk, soy, eggs, fish, wheat, and peanuts can be avoided for at least one to two weeks on a trial basis.

Are environmental causes important, and should they be eliminated?

Rarely does elimination of contact or airborne substances bring about lasting relief. Occasionally plant allergens and dust and dust-catching objects like feather pillows, down comforters, kapok pillows and mattresses, carpeting, drapes, and wool along with other rough fabrics, can cause the condition to worsen. Anxiety and stress are also exacerbating factors of eczema.

What should be done to treat this condition?

Treatment is geared toward avoidance of irritants such as rough, scratchy, or tight clothing and woolens, rapid changes of temperature and any activity that provokes sweating. Proper skin care can be optimized by use of bland creams applied directly after bathing while skin is still damp and one other time that day.

Medicated steroid creams or ointments or creams that locally suppress the immune system might be prescribed to control inflamed (red) and itchy skin. It is important to follow your provider's instructions, as inappropriate use of topical steroids can cause the skin to become fragile and tear easily.

Below is a list of general guidelines.

- 1) Avoid any fragrances or products with a good smell.
- 2) Avoid hot water. Baths should be short (5 minutes or less), and in cool lukewarm water only.
- 3) Use less irritating liquid soaps such as Cetaphil.
- 4) Keep the temperature in your home cool. If the air is dry, use a humidifier to increase the moisture in the air.
- 5) Use a bland thick white moisturizer such as Elta Melting Moisturizer immediately after bathing while skin is still damp. Apply more anytime the skin looks dry (3-5 applications each day is reasonable).
- 6) Use medicated creams or ointments as prescribed by Dr. Pena.
- 7) Avoid wool or other fabrics that seem to cause worsening of the rash or scratching.
- 8) Avoid dryer sheets, fabric softeners, and detergents, if possible. Consider double-rinsing clothes if detergents are used. The following is a list of fragrance free laundry detergents (no dyes or perfumes): All Free and Clear, Tide Free, Cheer Free, Purex Free.
- 9) An oral anti-itch medicine may be prescribed. This will usually be an antihistamine like Zyrtec, Claritin, Allegra or Benadryl. Benadryl may cause drowsiness. These are safe and a slightly larger dose before bedtime may be especially helpful to reduce scratching during sleep.
- 10) Always watch for things that seem to make the rash worse. Try to avoid exposure to these things.

11) Remember that taking care of atopic eczema takes a lot of effort and patience. A slow response to treatment or flare-ups of the rash can be uncomfortable and frustrating. You may be asked to return to the office regularly until the rash is under control.

Treatment Plan

Apply _____ cream/ointment _____ times each day to _____.
 Apply _____ cream/ointment _____ times each day to _____.
 Apply _____ cream/ointment _____ times each day to _____.

Antihistamines

Benadryl 12.5mg/5ml syrup	1 teaspoon every 6 hours as needed during the day	(10-30 kg)
	2 teaspoons before bedtime as needed	(10-30kg)
Benadryl 25mg/5ml syrup	1 teaspoon every 6 hours as needed	(>30kg)

Less sedating antihistamines

Zyrtec 5mg/5ml	<u> </u> <i>or</i> 1 teaspoon daily	(2-5 yo <i>or</i> >5yo)
Zyrtec 10mg	1 tablet daily	(>5yo)
Claritin 5mg/5ml	1 <i>or</i> 2 teaspoons daily	(2-5yo <i>or</i> >5yo)
Claritin reditabs	1 tablet daily	(>5yo)
Claritin 10mg	1 tablet daily	(>5yo)
Allegra 60mg or 180mg	1-2 times daily	(>12yo)