

PEDIATRIC ASSOCIATES OF AUSTIN, P.A.

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Atopic Dermatitis (Eczema)

Definition

Atopic dermatitis, or eczema, is an inherited skin problem that causes dry, red, scaly, itchy skin. It begins in infancy and lasts through childhood (and occasionally through teen years), slowly improving with age.

Symptoms

This type of dry skin is most commonly observed in the flexural surfaces of skin (in elbow and knee creases) but can also affect the entire body. The dry skin causes redness, irritation, and itching. Like all rashes, the redness will become more pronounced when the skin is warm, such as after getting out of a bath or when waking up in the morning after being warm and cozy in bed.

Causes

Eczema is typically an inherited condition, being more common in families who have history of atopic dermatitis. Due to the inherited nature, eczema can't really be prevented, but with avoidance of triggers as well as treatments, it can be managed well.

Treatment

- **Avoid skin irritants** such as:
 - **Fragranced soap/moisturizer:** Anything with fragrance or not listed as hypoallergenic can exacerbate eczema symptoms. See tips below.
 - **Scented detergent:** We recommend hypoallergenic and fragrance free detergent. Typically, these have a name such as "free and clear." If possible, washing caregivers' clothes in the same detergent is also helpful.
 - **Skin contact with household chemicals:** It's helpful to lay a blanket washed in the infants' detergent over the surface where they play to avoid skin contact with surfaces recently cleaned with chemicals.
 - **Prolonged time in water (aka frequent or prolonged bathing):** Because water is drying to the skin, we recommend short and infrequent baths.
 - **Prolonged exposure to cold air:** Winter weather greatly exacerbates dry skin. Wear gloves outside in the cold and use a humidifier inside your child's room.
- **Provide the skin with moisture:**
 - In bath, use hypoallergenic cleanser rather than soap
 - **When out of bath, pat dry and then immediately apply a thick cream or ointment.** Thick creams include Eucerin, Cetaphil, and Nutraderm. Ointments include Aquaphor, petroleum jelly, and Vaseline. Make sure the one you choose is hypoallergenic and fragrance free. **This should be applied at least 2 times/day.**
- **Use topical medications when needed:** When eczema flares, we will often recommend treatment with topical medications, such as topical steroids. Be sure to apply the topical steroid, then apply the moisturizer.
- **Use oral medications when needed:** When eczema flares causing itching, we will often recommend treatment an oral antihistamine, such as Zyrtec.

HOW TO CHOOSE PRODUCTS FOR YOUR CHILD'S SKIN

- Choose cleanser, detergent, and moisturizers that are hypoallergenic and fragrance free
- Choose gentle skin cleanser rather than soap in bath, such as: Cetaphil, CeraVe, Vanicream
- Choose a moisturizer that is a thick cream or ointment rather than a lotion. These have less water and a lower alcohol content, so they are not as drying. Examples of thick creams and ointments include Eucerin, Cetaphil, Nutraderm, Aquaphor, petroleum jelly, and Vaseline.
- Avoid products with these ingredients: fragrances, essential oils, tea tree oil, urea, retinoids, lanolin, cocamidopropyl betaine, propylene glycol, ethanol