

## **Atopic Dermatitis**

Atopic dermatitis is an inflammatory skin condition characterized by dry, red, itchy, scaly skin that is persistent and tends to recur. It is not contagious. Scratching is common and contributes to changes in the skin typical of atopic dermatitis. Areas especially affected are the face, neck and bends of the arms and legs. Lesions can develop that weep, crack, swell and crust over. Atopic dermatitis commonly runs in families and often occurs along with asthma and allergic rhinitis. Food allergies are also more frequently seen in children who suffer from this skin disorder.

**The following recommendations can help reduce the severity of atopic dermatitis:**

1. Use Tide free, Dreft, Cheer free, Purex free or other hypoallergenic detergents for clothes.
2. Run a humidifier in the house during cold weather.
3. Avoid rough fabrics and textures such as wool and nylon that can be irritating to skin. Sand found in sandboxes or at the beach can also be an irritant.
4. Prevent exposure to allergens such as grass, pollens, dust mites, animal dander and certain foods. Allergy testing can be helpful.
5. Give infrequent baths in lukewarm water, for less than 10 minutes, using fragrance-free cleanser (only if necessary) such as Dove for sensitive skin, Cetaphil Gentle Cleanser, Aveeno Body Wash or CeraVe Cleanser. Avoid scrubbing.
6. Bath oils help lubricate the skin but can make the bathtub slippery so use with caution. Another option is to spray bath oil on the wet skin following the bath or shower and pat dry.
7. After baths, pat dry gently and then immediately apply an occlusive moisturizer over the entire skin surface to retain moisture in the skin.

**Recommended moisturizers include CeraVe, Cetaphil, Eucerin, Aveeno and Aquaphor.**

- Moisturizers should be applied at least **2 times per day**, but as often as 4 during flare ups. For severe dry skin, ointment based moisturizers are most effective, followed by creams. Lotions provide the least protection as a skin barrier and should not be used.
- Suitable sunblock options include Neutrogena sensitive skin SPF 60+ or Neutrogena Pure and Free Baby spf 60+.
- Triple Paste, Vaseline and Aquaphor are diaper rash ointments recommended for babies with atopic dermatitis.

**Wet dressings are used to treat severe eczema flares.** Bandages that have been soaked in warm water are applied over the steroid cream or emollient and left in place 15 minutes to 1 hour, 3-4 times per day.

**Prescription emollients are sometimes prescribed by your doctor.**

- TriCeram is a new moisturizer that repairs the stratum corneum barrier function of the skin.
- Aquacare cream and Ureacin Crème are urea-containing products that have been shown to soften and moisturize dry skin.
- Aqua Lacten Lotion, AmLactin Lotion, LactiCare Lotion, Lac-Hydrin Lotion, and Nutraderm 30 are alpha-hydroxy and lactic acid preparations to help repair skin.
- 12% Ammonium lactate lotion has been shown to improve skin barrier function.

Complications of atopic dermatitis including repeated skin infections can be prevented by adding 1½ cups of bleach to bath water. Antibiotic ointment will help heal infections when they occur. Also, during acute atopic dermatitis exacerbations, pouring 1 cup of table salt into the bath may lessen the stinging effect often experienced while bathing.

Steroid creams/ointments are effective in treating exacerbations of eczema when emollients are not sufficient. They relieve itching by reducing inflammation. However, the lowest strength and smallest amount of steroid cream should be used. Very potent steroids have long term effects of thinning skin, stretch marks and dilating blood vessels.

**Commonly prescribed steroids according to potency:**

**Low-potency:** hydrocortisone, desonide

**Mid-potency:** fluticasone, triamcinolone, fluocinolone

**High-potency:** mometasone, betamethasone, desoximetasone

**Very high-potency:** clobetasol, halobetasol, diflorasone

Anti-itch medication such as Benadryl may help to relieve itching somewhat, but it primarily acts as a sedative to encourage sleep. Oatmeal bath additives and pine tar preparations also relieve itchy skin. Nutritional supplements including primrose oil, fish oil, borage oil and other vitamins and minerals do not have proven efficacy as a treatment option for atopic dermatitis and can be expensive.

Atopic dermatitis can be a frustrating skin disease to battle due to its relapsing pattern. Do not hesitate to call your doctor if you have any questions about your child's medication or plan of care; if a topical steroid is used for 7 - 14 days without improvement; or if your child develops pus bumps, water-filled blisters, yellow drainage, or other signs of possible infection.

***Resources:***

<http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/911574-treatment>

<http://www.mydr.com.au/skin-hair/eczema-prevention-and-treatment>

**Guidelines of care for the management of atopic dermatitis, American Academy of Dermatology**

<https://www.aad.org/File%20Library/Global%20navigation/Education%20and%20quality%20care/AD-part-3.pdf>

**Texas Children's Hospital**

[http://www.texaschildrens.org/uploadedFiles/Content/Content\\_Listing/atopic%20dermatitis%20%28eczema%29.pdf](http://www.texaschildrens.org/uploadedFiles/Content/Content_Listing/atopic%20dermatitis%20%28eczema%29.pdf)