



Health News from the DCF Medical Team

ECZEMA

What is Eczema?

Eczema is a term that is used for a number of different skin conditions. Eczema is chronically itchy, dry, thickened skin and often is on the hands, neck, face and legs in children. There are mainly two types of Eczema: Atopic Dermatitis and Contact Dermatitis. Atopic Dermatitis often occurs in infants and children who have allergies or a family history of allergy or eczema. Contact Dermatitis can occur when the skin comes in contact with an irritating substance or allergen. While there is no cure for eczema, it can be well controlled and often will go away after several months or years.

What causes Eczema?

The exact cause of eczema is unknown; it's thought to be linked to an overactive response by the body's immune system to an irritant that causes the symptoms. Eczema is most common in infants and outgrown by early adulthood. Children who have eczema will often also have a history of asthma or hay fever. Atopic eczema can be an allergic reaction, which can cause the skin to become inflamed or irritated.

The following can make eczema worse:

- ◆ Allergies to pollen, mold, dust mites, or animals
- ◆ Colds or the flu
- ◆ Contact with rough materials
- ◆ Dry skin
- ◆ Exposure to environmental irritants
- ◆ Exposure to water
- ◆ Feeling too hot or too cold
- ◆ Fragrances or dyes added to skin lotions or soaps
- ◆ Stress

What are the symptoms of Eczema?

Eczema symptoms can include some of all of the following:

- ◆ Dryness and skin rashes with red and irritated skin, sometimes with small, fluid-filled bumps that become moist and ooze;
- ◆ Itching, crusting, flaking, blistering, cracking;
- ◆ Sometimes the skin thickens, dries out and become scaly with coarse lines;
- ◆ Scratching can lead to sores with crusting and to infected skin. Some can suffer "flare-ups" in response to certain substances or conditions.
- ◆ For some children, contact with rough or coarse materials may cause the skin to become itchy. For others, feeling too hot or too cold, exposure to certain household products such as soap or detergent or coming into contact with animal dander may cause an outbreak.
- ◆ Upper respiratory infections or colds may also be triggers. Stress may cause the condition to worsen.

What is the treatment for Eczema?

The goal of treatment for eczema is to relieve and prevent itching, which can lead to infection. Since Eczema makes skin dry and itchy, lotions and creams are used to keep the skin moist. These are usually applied when the skin is damp, such as after bathing, to help the skin retain moisture. Cold compresses may also be used to relieve itching.

The most effective treatment is to prevent the skin from becoming dry and itchy and to avoid substances that cause Eczema to flare. This can be done using skin moisturizers (e.g., creams or ointments) frequently. After bathing, rinse twice to remove any residual soap (which might be an irritant). Apply the cream or ointment after getting out of the bath to lock in the moisture. Avoid harsh or irritating clothing (wool or coarse-weave material).

If the skin becomes infected; red hot, painful and irritated looking or a child has a fever, an emergency department visit may be necessary if the child cannot see the regular healthcare provider within 24 hours. If there is oozing or severe itching, use lukewarm compresses on the area, followed by the application of prescribed skin creams, not over the counter creams.

References: <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/skin/pages/Eczema.aspx>;
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001856/>