

THE DERMATOLOGY CENTER

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ATOPIC DERMATITIS (ECZEMA)

General Considerations

The skin in patients with atopic dermatitis is easily irritated, itchy, and very dry. Often eczema is associated with asthma and seasonal allergies (hay fever). In general, the least amount of irritation and trauma that affects your skin the better. Do not put anything on topically that has not been reviewed with your physician. Avoid strong fragrances/odors such as potpourri, cigarette smoke, scented candles, perfumes, etc.

Bathing

Contact with water washes away the natural oils in the skin that serve to moisturize, soften, and protect. Limit the number and duration (5-7 minutes) of baths or showers. Cool to lukewarm water temperature is desirable to minimize the drying effects of bathing. After getting out of the water, “pat” dry (*Do not rub*). This is a good time to apply prescription creams/ointments or moisturizers.

Soaps/Cleansers

Avoid harsh soaps (Ivory) or soaps which contain additives such as deodorants (Safeguard, Zest, Lever 2000, Irish Spring), perfumes (Bath and Body Works), or lanolin (Palmolive). Gentle, bland soaps (**Cetaphil, Cera Ve, Unscented Dove, Aveeno, Oilatum, Oil of Olay, Aquanil**) are the best. Neutrogena or baby shampoos (Johnson’s) are recommended for hair cleansing.

Bath oils are occasionally helpful, but avoid heavily perfumed types. Keri oil and Aveeno oatmeal are soothing.

Skin Lubrication

One of the most important aspects of skin care in patients with atopic dermatitis centers around the need to keep the skin well moisturized at all times. Creams and ointments are the most hydrating (moisturizing) with lotions being less so. We recommend the use of **Cetaphil, Cera Ve, Aveeno, Moisturel, Eucerin, DML Forte, Vanicream, Aquaphor, Crisco, or Vaseline** (petroleum jelly). You should apply these emollients as frequently (3-4x daily) and liberally as possible.

Laundry Detergents

It is best to use a perfume and dye free detergent (**Tide Free, Cheer Free, All Free, or Dreft**). In an infant both his or her clothing and other household members clothing should be washed in a “free” detergent. Avoid dryer sheets (Bounce), instead use “pour-in” fabric softeners and rinse the clothes twice.

Prescription Creams/Ointments

These medicines are best applied to moist skin especially right after bathing. Apply thinly to affected areas as directed by your physician. In general these are used for flares (skin is red and itchy) and are discontinued with improvement (7-10 days).

If there is a severe flare of the dermatitis, your doctor may suggest the “**Wet PJs**” regimen to gain quick relief. To do this the skin must be lightly moistened with water. Apply a thin layer of the prescribed cream/ointment to all affected areas. Moisten a pair of white cotton PJs with lukewarm/tepid water and place them on. Then wrap up in heavy cotton towels or put on a cotton sweat suit. This is worn for 30 minutes to 1.5 hours as directed 2-3x daily until control is achieved.