

Keep in control of your child's dry skin and eczema

Making life easier for children with eczema

- ✓ Help them avoid triggers when possible
- ✓ Continue daily use of emollients between flare-ups, even when their skin appears to be back to normal
- ✓ If itching is a problem use an itch relief cream
- ✓ Use steroid creams as specified by your healthcare professional
- ✓ Stick to their management strategy and encourage them to stay positive



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Take control

Nearly one in five children in the UK suffer from dry skin and eczema.

If your baby or child is one of them you'll probably agree that, however mild or severe, it can have a big impact on daily life.

This booklet gives you the information to help you become an expert in managing your child's dry skin and atopic eczema, so that you can take control and help make living with this condition easier for everyone.

What is eczema?

Eczema is an inflammatory condition of the skin that can occur at any time and anywhere on the body; but usually in the creases of the elbows and wrists and behind the knees. It varies in type, with atopic eczema being the most common, particularly in children. Sometimes their skin can be itchy, dry and red, and in severe cases it can be weepy and bleeding.

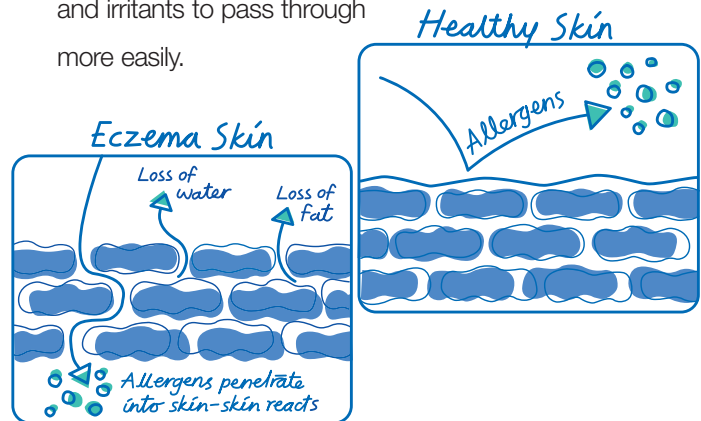


Atopic eczema

Atopic eczema is thought to run in families and can begin in babies from six weeks old and continue throughout childhood. Approximately 75% of children will have grown out of eczema by puberty.

Why does eczema occur?

Skin acts as a protective barrier for our bodies, keeping moisture in and infection and irritants out. Skin with eczema is less able to retain water. This allows gaps to open up between the skin cells and allergens and irritants to pass through more easily.



Because skin with eczema is prone to drying out and is easily damaged, it is more liable to get red, inflamed and itchy.

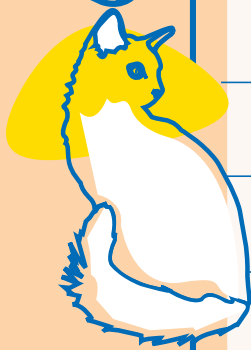
Be trigger happy

However careful you are about your child's eczema, some things can cause a flare-up. These are called triggers. By knowing their major triggers you can limit

your child's exposure to them. Here are some of the most common and tips on how to stop them being a problem.

Trigger	Tips
Soaps and perfumed bath or shower products	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use emollient washes and emollient bath oils designed for children with eczema
Washing powders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use non-bio washing powder
Central heating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep rooms cool, particularly their bedroom
Animal hair and dander	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep pets out of their bedroom• Wash their hands after contact with pets
Woollen clothes, man-made fibres	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dress them in smooth, soft cotton clothes and use cotton bed sheets
Duvets and pillows containing feathers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use synthetic alternatives; wash duvets and pillows regularly
Chlorine in swimming pools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid chlorinated pools, look for ozone- or UV-purified, salt-water or fresh-water alternatives• Apply emollients before and after swimming
Cold/hot weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dress them in layers of clothing to take on or off to suit the temperature – use a sunscreen developed especially for children with eczema
Certain foods e.g. milk and eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consult your child's doctor or dietician if a food allergy is suspected
House dust mites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a mattress protector and wash it regularly• Wash soft toys regularly

As illness is also a trigger, keeping your child as healthy as possible helps.



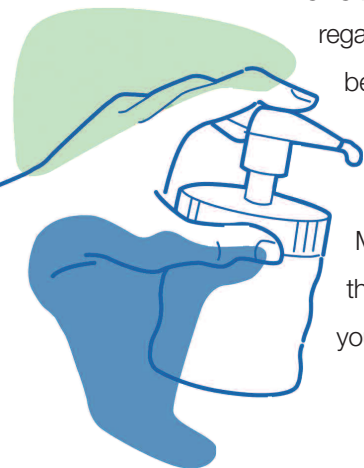
Keep your child's skin in tip top condition



Treatments for dry skin and eczema include emollients, itch relief creams and steroid creams. Knowing how they work together and how to use them properly will help you and your child keep on top of their eczema.

Stay soothed with emollients

Emollients are simple, non-cosmetic moisturisers that soothe and help relieve itchy, dry skin. They are key to managing your child's eczema, regardless of severity and should be used regularly, even if there are no obvious signs of dryness, redness or itch. Most are perfume-free and therefore suitable for delicate, young skin.



- Use emollients frequently, 2 or 3 times a day, even when your child's eczema is under control
- Use emollients liberally. If their dry skin and eczema is widespread, it is not unusual to use 250g of emollient in a week
- Apply the cream as gently as possible, in the direction hair grows – don't rub it in as this can aggravate their eczema
- To avoid contamination, do not put your hand in the emollient pot – use a spoon or spatula instead

Types of emollients

Ointments

For extra dry, fragile skin, good at night

Creams

Cooling and soothing, good for convenience during the day

Bath oils

Help moisturise during bathing, then leave a film of oil on the skin

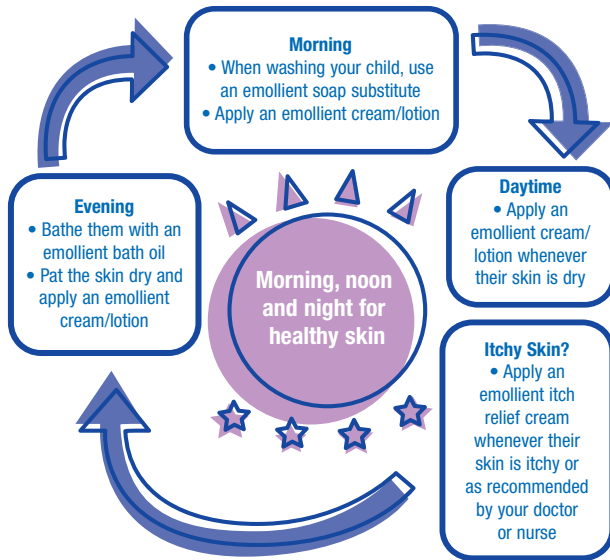
Soap substitutes/Emollient washes

Detergent-free wash which will not dry out your child's skin

The key to healthy skin

Emollients – morning, noon and night

By using the right products throughout the day, mild eczema can often be managed with emollients alone. For moderate and severe eczema, use them continuously as an essential part of your child's overall management strategy.



The easier way to apply emollients

Applying an emollient when your child's skin is sore and irritated can be time consuming and messy. If it becomes a real battle try:

- Turning cream application into a soothing baby/child massage
- Distract them by singing nursery rhymes or playing games

N.B. Never leave a child unattended in the bath or shower

Getting up to scratch with itch relief creams

It's natural for your child to want to scratch when their skin itches, but scratching releases histamine – a chemical that makes the skin even itchier. So, the more they scratch, the more they itch!

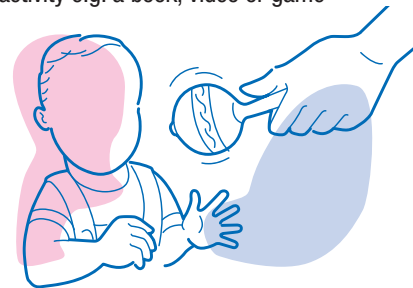
If itchy skin is a problem, your healthcare professional may recommend an itch relief cream suitable to use from three months, which both calms the itch and gently moisturises their skin.



Try not to let them scratch

This can seem impossible at times, but it's important because scratching can easily become an unconscious long-term habit. Here are a few things to try:

- Put 'scratch mittens' on babies
- Put a cooling, damp flannel on the itchy area, try ice cubes or frozen peas in a dry cloth
- Distract them with another activity e.g. a book, video or game
- Praise older children for not scratching, rather than tell them off when they do



Tackling flare-ups



Steroid creams

However careful you are, eczema may sometimes flare up.

Steroid creams, which are prescribed by your child's doctor

(and reviewed regularly), can be very effective in halting a flare-up and letting your child get on with life. They are safe to use if you follow your doctor's instructions.

Using steroid creams properly

- *Apply them as often and for as long as prescribed – 'half treating' can lead to the flare-up not clearing properly*
- *Wash your hands before and after applying steroid creams*
- *Apply only to areas of 'active' eczema in a thin film until the skin glistens*
- *The amount depends on the severity of their eczema, your doctor or nurse will advise you*
- *Steroid creams work best when used with emollients*
- *Wait for the steroid cream to be absorbed before applying emollient – at least 45 minutes*
Remember – while using steroid creams still be generous with emollients

If your child has frequent flare-ups, are you using emollients enough, is there an unidentified trigger, or could it be a sign of infection – in which case see your doctor.



Family life and school

When you have a baby or child with eczema, family life can be disturbed.

Itching can cause sleep disturbance for everyone and flare-ups added stress.

Your child may not like being

cuddled and may demand attention which can affect family dynamics.

Once children reach school age their performance may be affected by lack of sleep and teasing if their eczema is obvious. Swimming and gym lessons can also be difficult for them. However, it is important that they are encouraged to lead as normal a school life as possible.

Establishing an overall eczema management strategy early on and keeping to it can really help minimise symptoms.

Discussing your child's condition and treatments with their teacher at the beginning of the school year is a good idea too.

Talking can help

As well as your healthcare professional, talking to other experts or parents whose children suffer from dry skin and eczema can be enormously supportive.

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