

Eczema

Presentation: dry patches of skin which tend to be itchy and may also be red/irritated in appearance
: chronic condition which tends to wax and wane throughout the year
: secondary skin infections are common due to the disruption of the skin integrity
: may be associated with allergy and asthma symptoms
: sleeping difficulties are frequently noticed even if the eczema appears to be in remission
: tends to improve as the person gets older
: tends to run in families (genetic predisposition)

Potential Aggravating Factors: too much moisture (such as staying in the same socks all day long)
: too little moisture (such as winter)
: scratching
: stress, including an illness
: allergens, including wool and sometimes food
: irritants such as lanolin and lavender

Home Care: Keep the humidity between 25 and 40 percent.
: Keep the temperature between 68 and 72 degrees.

Laundry Care: Use a soap without dyes or perfumes, such as All Free and Clear.
: Make sure there is no soap left in the clothes after the final rinse cycle. This is more important than the particular brand of soap used. Residual soap can be removed with an additional rinse and then try using less soap with the next load of clothes.
: no or limited use of fabric softeners and, if used, choose those without dyes or perfumes
: Avoid using starch or bleach. If you need to use these products, rewash the clothes afterwards.
: For stains, soak the clothes in a mixture of OxyClean powder and water for 8 to 12 hours prior to washing. This is preferred to adding the OxyClean directly to the washer.

Clothing: If the eczema involves the feet, try using white socks which should be changed several times per day.
: wear cotton or smooth cotton/polyester clothing (not tight fitting)
: Avoid potential irritants such as wool and artificial fibers.

Bathing: Daily is preferred (twice per day during an exacerbation), but you need to observe the following rules:
1) Post a quick wash and thorough rinse, soak in clean water for 10 to 15 minutes.
2) Use cooler water, similar to that used in swimming pools.
3) If the water “burns”, add oatmeal powder or baking soda to the water.
4) Use a mild soap such as Olay Complete Body Wash, Cetaphil, Aveeno, Dove Unscented, Cerave, and Tone.
5) Don’t use bubble bath.
6) Pat, don’t rub, dry.
7) Apply a moisturizer immediately ideally to “damp” skin.

Bleach Bath (IF suggested by the physician):

Three (3) times per week, soak for 15 minutes in one quarter (1/4) tub of luke warm water to which was added one half (1/2) cup of **regular** bleach.

It is important to rinse well and apply moisturizer to damp skin after the bleach bath.

Skin Care: Avoid using antibacterial soaps unless so directed by a Physician. Apply a moisturizer as frequently as necessary to keep the dryness and itching under control. This may be anywhere from 1 to 10 times per day with the most important being right after the bath. Trying to make the skin “perfect” is not usually a realistic goal. The best choices include CeraVe, Cetaphil (especially RESTORADERM), Aveeno, and petroleum jelly (Vaseline). Other products that contain lanolin, aloe, and fragrances may be irritating to some people. Lotions go on easier but are more likely to sting. Ointments are more effective but may be uncomfortable in warmer weather.

*** Adequate moisturizer use is one of the most important aspects to achieving good control of the symptoms ***

Swimming Pools/Spas: Chlorine or bromine can be irritants for some individuals. Changing the product used, applying a moisturizer prior to getting in and rinsing afterwards sometimes minimizes this problem.

Medications: When prescribed, these are very safe with the benefits felt to outweigh the risks. However, it is important that they are used as directed by the physician.
: Sometimes oral antihistamines are utilized to help control the itching.
: Topical steroids are used as a **secondary measure** to help control exacerbations and stop the scratch-itch cycle. **The other measures outlined above, including proper bathing and adequate moisturizer use, are more important.** In general, applying several times per day for 3 to 5 days is better than once daily use for an extended period of time.

The degree to which the above directions are adhered to is dependent on the severity of the person’s symptoms and response to the measures initiated. Adequate treatment will minimize the risk of secondary complications including skin infections and scar formation.