

ALLERGY, ASTHMA & SINUS CENTER P.C.

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General information on Atopic Dermatitis (Eczema) for you or your child

Description Atopic dermatitis is a form of eczema commonly associated with allergies, asthma, and hay fever. The allergies are usually to those things that are airborne (e.g. pollen) or that come in contact with your skin (e.g. dust mites or cat/dog dander). Infants with atopic dermatitis may have allergy to foods. Food allergy is uncommon in adults.

The basic cause of AD seems to be a mutation in a protein called fillagrin, which normally helps seal the skin closed at the surface. Patients with AD have impairment of the barrier function of their skin. In other words, their skin has small holes in it that let things in that shouldn't get in. The things you are allergic to are called allergens. When these allergens get through the holes in AD skin, they cause inflammation. The skin becomes red and itchy. Patients scratch, making more and larger holes, more allergens get in, and the rash gets worse. The fluid of the lower skin may leak out, making the eczematous skin wet and oozy. Bacteria, such as Staphylococcus, love wet skin, and a secondary infection may develop.

Patients with AD should have allergy testing to see what their allergies are. The most common finding is allergy to dust mite. This is a small organism that feeds on dry skin flakes, such as those found in your sheets. Imagine being highly allergic to a bug that makes a home in your bed sheets!! Other common allergens are dog dander, cat dander, grass pollens, molds, and tree pollens.

Treatment involves:

- 1) Avoiding the allergens
- 2) Treating the eczema with topical medication
- 3) Treating normal skin with moisturizers, such as Eucerin Cream, Eucerin, Cetaphil, Aquaphor, and/or Vaseline.

The following recommendations are key:

- 1) Baths and showers may be one per day and for no more than 20 minutes. The water should be lukewarm or tepid. Pat yourself dry. Do not rub. Oatmeal and baking soda may be added to the bath for a soothing effect.
- 2) Hydration of the face or neck can be achieved by applying a wet facecloth or towel to the involved area for 15 to 20 minutes
- 3) Use a mild soap, such as Dove for Sensitive Skin, mild Ivory formula, Purpose, Oil of Olay, or Neutrogena. Avoid drying or irritating soaps, such as Zest, Irish Spring, and most deodorant soaps.
- 4) Apply all medications and moisturizers within one minute of getting out of the shower. The skin is clear of allergens. The cream or grease will protect the skin and help temporarily repair those AD skin holes. Furthermore, the skin is optimally hydrated, or water-logged, so that the medication you apply will not only penetrate, but also hold the skin's water in. Some recommended moisturizers include Eucerin, Aquaphor, Aveeno, Cetaphil

5) Apply prescription medication to the red, itchy areas. Use a clean Qtip surface to touch any cream before touching yourself. This prevents bacteria from getting into the cream and is what nurses do in the hospital. Typical topical steroid ointments include betamethasone, triamcinolone, and desonide. Never apply a moisturizer first and then the steroid in the same area. This is like eating a candy bar with the wrapper still on!! Always apply the steroid medicine first and then the moisturizer. Elidel and Protopic are special anti-inflammatory medications that may be used instead of steroids because they do not thin the skin, as steroids can. They are especially effective on the face and neck.

6) Apply a moisturizer to normal or dry skin.

The moisturizer must be greasy in order to adequately protect your sensitive skin. If it pours, it's worthless to you. It must be solid and feel greasy. I know this may not appeal to some people, but it will help your skin tremendously. Here is a list of preferred moisturizers: Cetaphil or Eucerin Creams. Please avoid lotions. SBR Lipocream (ask the pharmacist to help you find this) Aquaphor Vaseline, fragrance-free, or other petroleum jelly Crisco shortening (solid, non-butter flavored): It's cheap and works great! Remember, you don't have to put a lot on, especially in those areas that you don't want to look greasy: face and hands. Just apply enough to remove the dryness and make your skin feel soft and smooth. Of course, in areas that you don't care about greasy look, or when you're not going out, the greasier, the better. Consider wearing white cotton gloves over your greasy hands to help the grease penetrate and protect your house from smears. 6.

Finally, no scratching, rubbing, or picking, please. If an area is desperately itchy, use a cold compress, which is refrigerator temperature, or a cold soda can. The cold will drive away the itch. You can also try ice in a plastic bag that is wrapped in a towel.

7) To help with sleeping at bedtime, Benadryl may be used. It does not improve eczema, but it makes you sleepy so that you can rest.

8) Please seek medical assistance, if you see excessive oozing of the skin. This may represent infection that needs to be treated with oral antibiotics.

9) Please seek medical assistance, if your AD is severe and not improving with the above treatment. You may need oral steroids to control the inflammation.