

Tips on How to Care for Your Eczema (Atopic Dermatitis)

1. Limit or eliminate contact with things that irritate your skin.

Limiting contact with things that worsen eczema can help to control your symptoms. These things include:

- a) Too much bathing or showering, especially in hot water
- b) Dry home or work environments: Use a humidifier or place bowls of water in your home; always keep water on top of your wood stove; try to keep your home temperature less than 70 degrees.
- c) Rapid temperature changes
- d) Exposure to certain chemicals & cleaning solutions: always wear gloves when cleaning
- e) Common irritants:
 - Soaps and detergents (use rubber gloves)
 - Perfumes and make-up
 - Wool or synthetic fibers (try to wear cotton)
 - Dust and sand
 - Cigarette smoke
- f) Emotional Stress

2. Use your emollients daily

Emollients are the creams (Eucerin or Hydrocerin, Cetaphil) or ointments (petroleum jelly, Aquaphor) that return moisture to your skin and help relieve symptoms. They work best when applied right after bathing. Lotions often have alcohol and can actually worsen your dryness and itching.

3. Bathing

Lukewarm baths or showers can moisten and cool the skin and take away the itch for a while. Hot or long (more than 10 to 15 minutes) baths or showers can worsen the dryness. A mild soap, such as Dove, or non-soap cleanser should be used sparingly. Deodorant soaps (Dial, Irish Spring, Safeguard, etc) should not be used because they are very drying. It is best to pat dry rather than rubbing yourself

with your towel. Emollients should be applied within one minute of getting out of the shower or bath.

4. Topical steroids

Topical steroid creams and ointments such as 1% Hydrocortisone and 0.1% Triamcinolone can often control mild to moderate eczema. These are usually applied twice daily until the flare-up is improving. Only hydrocortisone should be used on the face. It is important to try to follow your doctor's instructions. Strong topical steroids, such as amcinonide, may be needed to control severe flares, but should only be used for short periods of time.

5. Oral steroids

If your eczema is really severe, your doctor may prescribe short courses of oral steroids such as Prednisone. These are usually given for short periods of time in order to limit the side effects.

6. Oral antihistamines

Oral antihistamines or allergy medicines can sometimes help reduce the itching that comes with eczema. The over-the-counter antihistamine diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or the prescription antihistamine hydroxyzine (Atarax) are most helpful but they often cause drowsiness. The newer "nonsedating" antihistamines such as loratadine (Claritin) may also relieve itching without making you sleepy.