

Atopic Dermatitis

Atopic dermatitis or eczema is a rash which develops in a characteristic pattern on the body and is accompanied by sensations of itch. Allergic conditions, such as asthma, hay fever, or hives, often run in the family of a person with atopic dermatitis. In fact, many people with atopic dermatitis may also have had one of those conditions themselves. Exactly how allergies contribute to atopic dermatitis is still poorly understood. In the majority of cases no single allergic factor can be found.

In general, there is a tendency for improvement with the passage of time. In about half of infants and toddlers with atopic dermatitis the skin problem clears by the age of two and never returns. In the other half it clears, but reappears during childhood or teenage years. In these individuals the condition may persist into adult years.

In adolescents or adults, the rash may not appear until there have been frequent intermittent exposures to "wet work". These individuals may develop severe hand eczema with intermittent minimal exposures to water, detergents, oils, or greases. "Nerves" or stress may make the condition worse. Atopic dermatitis often becomes worse during the winter months and tends to improve during warmer months.

Here are some basic principles which may prove helpful for the skin care of individuals with Atopic Dermatitis:

- Wear 100% cotton clothing. Avoid polyester or other synthetic fabrics. Avoid overdressing, which would result in sweating and further itching.
- Wash clothes with a mild powder detergent (Tide unscented powder, Dreft, All Free and Clear, Cheer Free). Use an extra rinse cycle in the washing machine- especially if using liquid detergent.
- Avoid fabric softener dryer sheets (Bounce, Downy, Snuggle, Cling free, etc.). Fragrance free liquid softeners or anti-static dryer balls are acceptable alternatives.
- Water softeners may be helpful in preventing flares. In lieu of a household softening system, an attachment on the shower head with a replaceable charcoal filter is available at most home improvement stores.
- Bleach baths (1/2 cup of chlorine bleach to a full tub of bath water) may be used once a week to control bacterial growth on the skin and prevent infection.
- Keep fingernails short – to avoid skin injury when scratching.
- Children should avoid individuals with cold sores or fever blisters. The virus can spread to eczematous skin.

Daily Care for Atopic Dermatitis

Morning:

- Apply prescription medication to any red, itchy areas (see below)
- Apply Cetaphil or CeraVe cream to entire body
- If needed, give oral antihistamine (low dose)

Mid-day:

- If skin feels dry, apply Cetaphil or CeraVe cream to entire body
- If needed, give oral antihistamine (low dose)

Evening:

- Bathe or shower with lukewarm water and mild soap (Dove unscented bar soap, Cetaphil cleanser, CeraVe Hydrating Cleanser, or Johnson and Johnson's Head to Toe baby wash)
- While the skin is still damp (within 3 minutes), apply prescription medication to any red, itchy areas (see below)
- While the skin is still damp (within 3 minutes), apply Vaseline or Aquapor to entire body (if too greasy use Cetaphil or CeraVe cream)
- If needed for itch, give oral antihistamine (full dose)

Medications:

- Topical steroid - to be used only on affected areas
- Antihistamine (taken by mouth to relieve itch) - if needed/prescribed