

CARING FOR YOUR CHILD WITH ATOPIC DERMATITIS

Atopic dermatitis (eczema) can affect children of all ages. The skin feels dry, may appear reddened, and is usually very itchy. Although we cannot explain exactly why the skin has these changes, we are learning more about how we can help children with atopic dermatitis. We can help control the symptoms, but we cannot cure the disease. So, there will be times when your child's skin has "flares" and needs more intensive treatment. There will also be times when your child's skin is clear and will only need moisturizers. Most children will eventually outgrow atopic dermatitis.

1. MOISTURIZE THE SKIN

The most important treatment is to provide additional moisture to the skin. There are many different moisturizers available – and cream and ointments work much better than lotions. Please avoid moisturizers that have scents or fragrance because these sometimes irritate the skin.

There are new creams that include a special fat, ceramide, that is especially helpful, but these are often more expensive. The most important thing is to use the moisturizer 2 – 3 times every day. UCSF Pediatric Dermatology recommends the following moisturizers:

Cetaphil cream	Aquaphor ointment
Cerave cream	Vaseline (plain petroleum jelly)
Eucerin cream	

_____ Moisturize all over twice a day with _____ (Talk with your pediatrician about how to fill in the blanks on this form.)

BATHING INFORMATION

- * Keep bathing time to 15 minutes or less
- * Use lukewarm water – avoid HOT or COLD water
- * Apply a mild non-soap cleanser such as Cetaphil cleanser or Aveeno wash. You can also use unscented Dove, Oilatum or Basis.
- * Use as little cleanser as possible and restrict use to visibly dirty areas and other areas as needed (armpits, groin, hands and feet)
- * Avoid bubble baths
- * Do NOT vigorously scrub with a washcloth, sponge, buff puff or brush
- * Pat skin with a towel to gently dry, leaving some moisture on the skin
- * Within 3 – 5 minutes of getting out of bath / shower, apply moisturizer

2. CONTROL ITCHING

Since children who have atopic dermatitis have very itchy skin, it is important to control the itching. There are several medications your doctor can prescribe to help with the itching, including Benadryl and Atarax.

_____ Take _____ at night to help with itching

3. ELIMINATE TRIGGERS

Some things can cause a child to have increased itching. These include:

- Wool clothing
- Increased heat, and sometimes cold temperatures
- Excessive bathing without moisturizing
- Use of harsh detergents or soaps

- e. Skin products that have fragrance or perfumes
 - f. Products that contain alcohol
 - g. Food allergies – please let your pediatrician know if you suspect a food allergy
- Try to eliminate these triggers from your child’s environment.

4. USE OF TOPICAL STEROIDS

Steroid creams, ointments, and lotions are used to decrease the inflammation caused by atopic dermatitis. The mildest steroid available is hydrocortisone ½% and 1%. Ointments tend to work better than cream as ointments help to moisturize the skin. However some people find the ointments too greasy and prefer to use the creams instead. You can use hydrocortisone cream or ointment 2 – 3 times a day for several weeks to help prevent worsening of your child’s atopic dermatitis. (Hydrocortisone can be used on the face, but stronger steroids should not be used without your doctor’s prescription.)

Stronger steroid medications include Triamcinolone and Dermasmoothe. Use these only as directed by your pediatrician.

When your child’s skin is not very inflamed, use _____

When you notice your child’s skin is becoming redder and is itching more, use _____

If your child’s skin is developing crusting or blisters, please call your pediatrician.

5. PREVENT INFECTION - and treat infection as directed

Children who have atopic dermatitis are more likely to develop bacterial skin infections that will make the rash worse. You can help prevent your child from developing a skin infection by control itching as described above.

Another way to help prevent infection is to have your child take a bath in Clorox water. The Clorox in the water will help kill the Staphylococcus bacteria that can cause skin infections.

Fill the bathtub with water. Place ¼ cup Clorox in the bath water, and have your child soak for 5 – 10 times. Do this 2 – 3 times a week. ALWAYS moisturize your child’s skin after bathing.

_____ Take a Clorox bath 2 – 3 times a week

_____ Use _____ antibiotic cream on affected skin

_____ Take _____ antibiotic by mouth to treat skin infection.

6. OTHER IDEAS

There are other ways to help children to have atopic dermatitis.

- a. Probiotics. Probiotics are good bacteria that can be taken orally. These bacteria seem to improve the immune system, and several studies have shown them to benefit children with atopic dermatitis.
- b. Omega 3 fatty acids. These fatty acids may help improve the ability of the skin to heal. Omega 3 fatty acids are available in several forms that are taken orally.

- c. Calendula ointment. This ointment has some anti-inflammatory properties and so may help decrease redness of skin as well as prevent infection. It is made from the calendula plant so should not be used by people who are allergic to the plant.

Used with permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. "Prescriptions for Parents"