

# ATOPIC DERMATITIS (ECZEMA) PATIENT INFORMATION

## INTRODUCTION

Atopic dermatitis, or eczema, is a common inflammatory condition of the skin. Symptoms include skin dryness, itching, irritation, redness, crusting, cracking, thickening, blistering, and weeping. While it persists throughout life, it is often most troublesome in babies and small children. Eczema is something that is usually inherited, and patients may also have nasal allergies or asthma. There are also a number of environmental factors that can aggravate eczema. The main things that aggravate eczema are excessive bathing, low humidity, stress, dry skin, scratching, overheating of skin, and exposure to strong chemicals and detergents.

While there is no cure for atopic dermatitis, there are a number of things that can be done to treat it. Following these recommendations should minimize the amount of trouble eczema causes for you.

### A NOTE ABOUT THE PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS YOU SEE HERE:

Cleansing and moisturizing products can be expensive, and they are not covered by insurance or Medicaid. To help you find the least expensive products available, several Wal-Mart generic products will be mentioned, but you can probably find similar generic items at large pharmacy chains. Also note that shopping for these things can be difficult, since they're often placed at multiple spots in stores, either with cosmetics, soaps, baby products, or other skin care products. And you may see the same product in different sizes at different areas of the store. A good rule of thumb is to buy these items in the largest size available to save money in the long run.

## DAILY SKIN CARE

- I. Minimize extremes of heat and humidity.
  - A. In hot and humid conditions, wear lightweight cotton clothing. A little bit of baby powder may also be helpful.
  - B. In cold and dry conditions, wear layers of clothing that can be added and removed as necessary. Especially avoid overdressing babies and excessive use of blankets, which can aggravate the rash. Cotton is a good clothing and bedding choice; synthetic fabrics and wool are sometimes scratchy, and may aggravate itching.
- II. Bathe properly.
  - A. Do not bathe excessively. One bath a day is usually sufficient, with focused cleaning of soiled areas in between. Excessive bathing can make the skin dry out. (Twice-daily bathing may be helpful during eczema flare-ups, however—more about this below.)
  - B. Bathe babies in lukewarm water; adults should bathe in the coolest water that is comfortable. Hot water aggravates itching. Many will find a tub bath more comfortable than a shower, since the water pelting down on you in the shower may aggravate itching; however, if a shower is comfortable for you, that is OK.

C. Follow these instructions when bathing:

1. Bathe only as long as necessary to get clean, generally not over 10-20 minutes.
2. Use **Equate Moisturizing Beauty Bar** (generic for regular **Dove Bar**); if you prefer a liquid body wash, use **Equate Deep Moisturizing Body Wash** (generic for **Dove Deep Moisturizing Body Wash**).

Alternative but more expensive products include **Cetaphil Gentle Skin Cleanser**; **Cetaphil Gentle Cleansing Bar**; **Aveeno Baby Wash & Shampoo**; **Vanicream Cleansing Bar**; **Vanicream Free & Clear Liquid Cleanser**; **Aquaphor Gentle Wash & Shampoo**.

3. Bathe gently! There is great temptation to pick and scrub, trying to remove all flakes, but this actually makes the flaking worse in the long run. If you wash gently a few flakes will come off today, a few more tomorrow, and in a week the skin will be much less flaky.
4. After bathing, *pat dry*. Do not rub vigorously, as this aggravates skin drying and itching. Leave the skin a little moist as you proceed to apply moisturizer as discussed below.

III. Moisturize liberally and correctly.

A. The thicker the moisturizer, the more effective it will be. Ointments are best, though many patients don't like the greasy feeling they leave. But if you will use an ointment at least once a day, preferably after bathing, it will help your eczema a lot.

1. A good, inexpensive ointment is **Equate Petroleum Jelly** (generic for **Vaseline**). Note, however, that even name-brand Vaseline is pretty inexpensive, and sometimes available in a larger jar than generics.
2. An equally good but more expensive alternative is the related product petrolatum. The least costly version is **Equate Advanced Healing Ointment** (generic for **Aquaphor Healing Ointment** from **Eucerin**).
3. To make ointments more tolerable, remember a little goes a long ways. To minimize messiness, after applying ointment cover or dress the area with a loose cotton garment, such as a T-shirt, old sock with the toe cut out, or a baby onesie. If preferred, add another item of cotton clothing on top of this.

B. If you don't want to use ointments, or you want something less messy to use intermittently throughout the day, thick creams are the next best choice. They still feel a little waxy when applied, but not as greasy as ointments.

1. A good and relatively inexpensive thick cream is **Equate Therapeutic Moisturizing Cream** (generic for **Eucerin Original Healing Soothing Repair Crème**).
2. Another good but more expensive option is **Cetaphil Moisturizing Cream**.

C. Lotions are often the moisturizer patients prefer, since they can be rubbed into the skin and are the least messy. However, while it may not make sense at first, lotions can actually aggravate itching as they evaporate, or encourage you to rub the skin too much. If you choose to use a lotion, apply gently, and try to leave a little layer on the skin instead of rubbing it in completely.

1. A good, inexpensive lotion is **Equate Advanced Recovery Skin Care Lotion** (generic similar to **Eucerin Original Healing Soothing Repair Lotion**).
2. Another good but more expensive option is **CeraVe Moisturizing Lotion**.

#### IV. Have a plan to treat itching.

A. Itching can be the most annoying symptom, but there are several things that can be done to help. When your infant has eczema, though, remember that sometimes the rash bothers the parent more than it bothers the child. If the child doesn't appear uncomfortable, relax a bit.

B. Do not use rubbing alcohol! This is a common folk remedy for itching, but it is very drying, and actually makes itching worse.

C. Tepid to cool baths and compresses are helpful for itching.

D. Chilled moisturizer can provide great relief for itching. Keep a jar of moisturizer in the refrigerator. As discussed above, ointment is preferable to thick cream, which is preferable to lotion. Rub the moisturizer on with the fingertips, making sure not to scratch with the fingernails.

E. Wet wraps are the best thing you can do for itching. Wet a cotton garment or wrap, such as a towel, cut-off cotton sock, or T-shirt, and place it in the refrigerator. Apply moisturizer to the itching area, cover with the chilled garment, then cover with a dry garment. Leave on for 8 hours, or sleep in it. This is particularly good for small children, since it will help keep them from scratching.

F. Antihistamines are helpful for itching.

1. **Diphenhydramine** (generic for **Benadryl**) is available without a prescription; follow the age-appropriate dosing on the bottle, or other directions given by your doctor. Note that this can make you a bit sleepy, however.
2. If sleepiness is a problem, the nonsedating antihistamine **loratadine** (generic for **Claritin**) can be helpful. It is available without a prescription; follow the age-appropriate dosing on the bottle, or other directions given by your doctor.
3. Other over-the-counter antihistamines may also be used.
4. Your doctor may give you other medications for itching as well:

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V. Avoid **Neosporin** and generic **bacitracin/neomycin/polymyxin B** ointments! Many patients quickly become allergic to the ingredient **neomycin**, making their rashes worse. Generic **bacitracin/polymyxin B (Polysporin)** ointment is available over the counter, and is the preferable choice any time you need a non-prescription antibiotic ointment.

VI. Your doctor may have you use other medications as well on a routine basis.

A. Topical steroids—apply to affected areas once daily on Saturday and Sunday, or as otherwise directed:

Face, neck, underarms, or groin

Hydrocortisone 2.5% cream or ointment (Group VII)

Desonide 0.05% cream (Group VI)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Body

Triamcinolone 0.1% cream (Group V)

Triamcinolone 0.1% ointment (Group IV)

Mometasone 0.1% cream (Group IV)

Mometasone 0.1% ointment (Group III)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Other anti-inflammatory preparations—apply to affected areas once daily on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, or as otherwise directed:

Tacrolimus (Protopic) 0.03% ointment

Tacrolimus (Protopic) 0.1% ointment

Pimecrolimus (Elidel) 1% cream

C. Measures to suppress infection:

Mupirocin (Bactroban) ointment twice daily in each nostril the first 7 days of the month

Bleach 1/3 cup in a full tub of water. Soak from the neck-down for 5-10 minutes. Rinse with fresh water, pat dry, and apply moisturizer. Repeat twice weekly.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## FLARE-UP TREATMENT ACTION PLAN

No matter how well your atopic dermatitis is doing overall, at times it will flare up. This can be brought about by minor viral illnesses, allergies, stress, or any number of reasons. Follow these instructions when the rash worsens.

<b>Green Zone: Skin has <i>very mild</i> redness/irritation</b>
Continue all daily skin care instructions as above.
Apply twice daily until flare-up is resolved, up to 10 days maximum: <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrocortisone 2.5% cream or ointment (Group VII) <input type="checkbox"/> Desonide 0.05% cream (Group VI) <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Apply twice daily until 7 days after flare-up has resolved: <input type="checkbox"/> Tacrolimus (Protopic) 0.03% ointment <input type="checkbox"/> Tacrolimus (Protopic) 0.1% ointment <input type="checkbox"/> Pimecrolimus (Elidel) 1% cream

<b>Yellow Zone: Skin has <i>moderate</i> redness/irritation/itching</b>
Continue all daily skin care instructions as above, except bathe twice daily.
For FACE, NECK, UNDERARMS, and GROIN: Apply twice daily until flare-up is resolved, up to 10 days maximum: <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrocortisone 2.5% cream or ointment (Group VII) <input type="checkbox"/> Desonide 0.05% cream (Group VI) <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
For REST OF BODY: Apply twice daily until flare-up is resolved, up to 10 days maximum: <input type="checkbox"/> Triamcinolone 0.1% cream (Group V) <input type="checkbox"/> Triamcinolone 0.1% ointment (Group IV) <input type="checkbox"/> Mometasone 0.1% cream (Group IV) <input type="checkbox"/> Mometasone 0.1% ointment (Group III) <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Apply 3 times a day to open/oozing areas until clear: <input type="checkbox"/> Mupirocin (Bactroban) ointment

**Red Zone: Skin has *severe* redness/irritation/itching/oozing**

Continue all daily skin care instructions as above, except bathe twice daily. After bathing, apply any medications that are due, then moisturizer, then wet wrap as described above.

For FACE, NECK, UNDERARMS, and GROIN:

Apply twice daily until flare-up is resolved, up to 10 days maximum:

- Hydrocortisone 2.5% cream or ointment (Group VII)
- Desonide 0.05% cream (Group VI)
- Other:

For REST OF BODY:

Apply twice daily until flare-up is resolved, up to 10 days maximum:

- Triamcinolone 0.1% ointment (Group IV)
- Mometasone 0.1% ointment (Group III)
- Desoximetasone 0.25% cream or ointment (Group II)
- Clobetasol 0.05% cream or ointment (Group I)
- Other:

Apply 3 times a day to open/oozing areas until clear:

- Mupirocin (Bactroban) ointment

Call for appointment if not clearly improving in 3-5 days.