

## Eczema

### What is eczema?

Eczema is chronic itchy, dry skin. It is common to have “flare-ups” and times when the skin is clear.

Signs of eczema include:

- constantly dry skin
- red, itchy patches of rash, often worse during winter
- may become raw and moist if scratched
- in young children it is most common in the elbow creases, wrists and knees; sometimes on neck, ankles, feet, and other areas of the body
- older children may have it on their hands, feet, and eyelids
- sometimes it starts on the cheeks in infants
- thickening or changes in skin color can occur after a period of time

### What causes eczema?

The cause of eczema is unknown, but it may run in families. Many people with eczema also have or may develop allergies. Flare-ups of eczema can occur if:

- skin touches an irritating substance such as soap or chlorine,
- skin is exposed to water for too long without a moisturizer follow-up
- there is a change in humidity or a change of season

### How should I care for my child?

#### Keep the skin moist

1. Follow your doctor’s instructions about bathing. Children’s needs for moisture may vary.
2. Use non-deodorant, unscented mild soap such as Cetaphil® or unscented Dove®. Use soap only on areas of the body that get dirty—such as face, hands, feet, and bottom—and only at the end of the bath, to avoid soaking in soapy water. Avoid harsh soaps. **No bubble baths.** Keep shampoo off the eczema areas.
3. Pat skin dry with a towel, leaving the skin moist.
4. To help seal in the moisture, apply an unscented moisturizer (such as Eucerin® cream, Moisturel®, or Lubriderm®) to the whole body **right after the bath** and several times a day.
5. If your child’s skin does not improve with frequent use of lotions, you may need to see your health care provider for a prescription cream.
6. If a cream is prescribed for flare-ups, apply it **before** the moisturizer. Most prescribed creams can only be used twice a day.

## Prevent and control itching

Avoid these things:

- too much heat
- dry air (use a humidifier if needed)
- chlorine (such as in swimming pools or hot tubs)

Wear cotton next to the skin and avoid scratchy wool clothing. New clothes may be less irritating if they are washed before being worn.

Keep your child's fingernails short and clean to limit scratching and prevent infection. Put cotton socks or mittens on young children's hands to prevent scratching during sleep.

A medicine may be prescribed to relieve itching.

## When should I call the clinic?

Call the clinic if:

- itching interferes with sleep
- itching is severe, cannot stop scratching
- rash becomes raw or is bleeding
- skin looks infected or has pus
- fever (temperature higher than 101 F)

Oral antibiotics may be needed if a skin infection occurs.

## Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child but provides general information. If you have any questions, please call the clinic.

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our Web site: [www.childrensmn.org](http://www.childrensmn.org).

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