

# Things to Know About Atopic Dermatitis (Eczema)

## Definition

Atopic dermatitis (eczema) is an itchy inflammation of the skin and is usually a long-lasting (chronic) condition. Eczema is not an allergy itself, but allergies can trigger eczema. About 1 out of every 10 kids develop eczema. Symptoms typically appear within the first few months of life and almost always before a child turns five. The good news is that more than half of the kids who have eczema today will be over it by the teenagers. Eczema is not contagious and cannot be spread from one person to another.

## Causes

The exact cause of atopic dermatitis (eczema) is unknown, but is likely due to a combination of dry, irritated skin together with a malfunction in the immune system. It often occurs along with allergies or asthma and frequently runs in families.

## Symptoms

- Extremely dry-looking skin
- Red to brownish-gray colored patches
- Itching, which may be severe, especially at night
- Small, raised bumps, which may leak fluid and crust over when scratched
- Thickened, cracked, or scaly skin
- Raw, sensitive skin from excessive scratching

Though the patches can occur anywhere, they most often appear on the hands and feet, in the front of the bend of the elbow, behind the knees, and on the ankles, wrists, face, neck, and upper chest. It can also affect the skin around your eyes, including your eyelids. Symptoms also tend to worsen and improve over time, with flare-ups occurring periodically. Itching may be severe, and scratching the rash can make it worse. Breaking this itch-scratch cycle can be challenging.

## Diagnosis

Diagnosing eczema can be challenging because:

- Each child experiences a unique combination of symptoms that also tend to vary in severity.
- sometimes confused with other skin conditions.
- There is no test available to diagnose it definitively.
- Eczema is typically diagnosed based on an examination of the skin and a review of medical history.

## Treatments

- Over-the-counter anti-itch creams
- Soothing, non-scented and non-alcohol based lotions
- Prescription corticosteroid creams or ointments
- Antibiotics
- Oral antihistamines (Benadryl)
- Oral corticosteroids (i.e., Prednisone)
- Immunomodulators (i.e., Protopic and Elidel)

Helping Your Child

You can help prevent or treat eczema by keeping your  
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skin from becoming dry or itchy and avoiding