

Health Tips for Parents

JANUARY 2013 | VOLUME 89

Does my child have eczema?

Unlike a common rash that gradually goes away, eczema is a persistent condition that results in red, irritated and itchy skin. Continuous scratching may cause infected yellow crusts or bumps on the skin.



Eczema is not contagious, but can be uncomfortable



both physically and emotionally for children. Children typically outgrow the condition by adolescence, although

some people may have it throughout their lives. "Parents can take steps to relieve symptoms using topical solutions, antibiotics and other practical strategies," advises Carlos Lerner, MD, medical director, Children's Health Center, Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA.

Treatment

The first step is to remove or reduce irritants in the household that may be the cause of flare-ups. For example, switch to a mild laundry detergent designed for sensitive skin. Also, advise children to avoid, when possible, getting sweaty and to wash their hands only when necessary.

When bathing, children should use only a small amount of mild soap with cool to warm water. Soaking in a tub for 10 to 20 minutes can help the skin absorb water. Afterwards, children should dry off and apply a chemical free, non-fragrant moisturizer or petroleum jelly to help seal in moisture and reduce itching. Frequent, consistent moisturizing is the key step in controlling symptoms and avoiding flare-ups.

A widespread rash and extreme itching marks severe cases of eczema. Children with severe eczema should meet with an immunologist or allergist who will take a complete medical history and run a series of diagnostic tests, including environmental and food allergy tests. If the child is found to have allergies, an allergist or dietician can provide guidance about how to avoid these irritants.

Eczema can flare up when cells in the skin over-react to common triggers, such as:

- Dry skin
- Irritants (including household chemicals, such as laundry detergent, soaps or certain fabrics)
- Stress
- Heat and sweating
- Infections
- Allergens (including pollen, mold, dust, animal dander)



Consult your physician for prescription medication.

A pediatrician or dermatologist may prescribe stronger topical creams or antibiotics if the over-the-counter remedies are not effective, advises Dr. Lerner. Other prescription topical medications have become available to treat eczema in children who do not tolerate topical steroids or do not improve sufficiently with them.

This information is provided courtesy of the pediatricians at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA. UCLA Health System pediatricians are conveniently located in your neighborhood. In addition to our Children's Health Center in Westwood, we have offices in Brentwood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional.