



Health Tips for Parents

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How to recognize and treat atopic dermatitis

Pediatric atopic dermatitis (AD), also referred to as allergic eczema, is a chronic skin disease marked by dry, sensitive skin that easily becomes red, scaly and severely itchy.

Diagnosis

Atopic dermatitis affects 20 to 30 percent of children and adolescents in the U.S., with most children exhibiting symptoms by age 5. “In infants, a rash will typically first appear on the face and scalp,” explains Ronald Cotliar, MD, UCLA pediatric dermatologist. “As children get older, the rash will spread and start to localize around the creases of their necks, wrists, elbows, knees, ankles and armpits.” By adulthood, about 40 percent of childhood AD cases will subside or significantly improve, but for others, the condition may manifest in different places.

Atopic dermatitis has not been traced to a singular cause, but has been linked to several factors, including genetics, immune system problems, an abnormal skin barrier and environmental conditions such as extreme temperatures or allergens.

Treatment

“There are a number of proven ways to treat and control AD,” Dr. Cotliar says.

For children with mild AD, three common treatment recommendations include:

1. Taking a daily bath with mild body wash
2. Applying moisturizer to the irritated areas while the skin is damp
3. Applying topical corticosteroids up to twice a day to reduce redness, inflammation and itching, as directed by your doctor

For moderate to severe AD, shower and moisturize as stated above but consult your pediatrician about stronger topical medications or other therapies that may be necessary to treat severe itching/allergic reactions.

“It is extremely important that parents and caregivers avoid placing their children on any special diets, such as elimination diets, to treat AD on the recommendation of a friend or online chat group,” says Dr. Cotliar. Instead, families should work with their pediatricians to learn how to best support their child.

Triggers

Some common AD triggers:

- Dry skin, often due to excessive washing
- Changes in weather or overheating
- Certain foods associated with common allergies
- Allergens (dust mites, pollen, mold)
- Fragrant toiletries containing alcohol
- Harsh soaps and detergents
- Wool or synthetic clothing
- Infection
- Stress



Supporting your child

Each child is different and may exhibit varying levels of sensitivity to different triggers. Be mindful of what soothes your child’s skin and what causes flare-ups. Take proactive measures to avoid exasperating the condition, such as keeping your child’s skin moisturized throughout the day or purchasing soft, breathable clothes if your child seems to be itchier in certain fabrics. For an individualized treatment plan, schedule a visit with your child’s pediatrician.