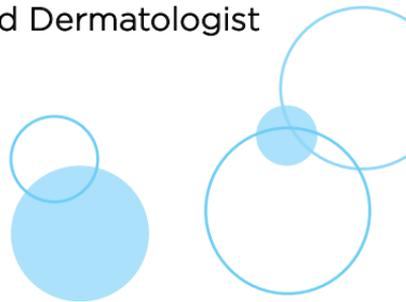




An Everyday Guide to Eczema

By Dr. Kristel Polder, Board-Certified Dermatologist



Developed in Partnership with



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Who is affected by eczema?

32
million people
in the US

1 in 5
children

1 in 12
adults

*www.eczema.org

What is eczema?

Eczema is a common, non-contagious, dry skin condition which can lead to dry, scaly skin with some redness and itching, though in more severe cases the skin can crack, bleed, and/or crust. There are many different forms of eczema, or dermatitis. **Atopic dermatitis**, the most common form of eczema, is the classic scaly patches that usually begin in childhood and affect the extensor surfaces of the arms and backs of the knees. **Irritant or allergic contact dermatitis** is a reaction to a topical product applied to the skin. **Nummular eczema** is coin-shaped scaly patches occurring usually on the lower extremities. The itching and soreness from severe eczema can significantly impact one's quality of life, often leading to sleepless nights, moodiness, and low self-esteem, leaving sufferers in desperate need of eczema relief.

What causes eczema?

It has long been thought that a combination of **genetics** along with **environmental triggers** has played a role in causing eczema. Eczema patient's skin is unable to properly retain moisture, which may be caused by a deficiency in naturally occurring moisturizing factors found in normal skin. Eczema patients suffer from **dysfunctional skin barrier function** which can cause dry, crusty, scaly skin with itching as a common symptom. **An emerging concept is taking into consideration the idea of the microbiome and promoting healthy bacteria already present on the skin.** Topical products, which foster the growth of healthy bacteria present on the skin ("prebiotic" topicals), can potentially shift the balance in favor of wellness (healthy skin) versus disease (atopic skin).

How to Treat Eczema



Focus on Barrier Repair: Use mild cleansers without fragrance or harsh additives, and avoid bubble baths. Use daily moisturizers, which have good humectant and hydrating ingredients such as Shea Butter and Glycerin. A great way to tell which moisturizers and cleansers are appropriate is to check the National Eczema Association website for a list of qualified products. For more severe cases, a dermatologist will often prescribe a steroid cream.



Treat the Itch: It is important to prevent and treat itching in order to avoid disrupting the skin barrier further and prevent infections from occurring. Treating the itch intimately involves working on barrier repair by using good moisturizers and gentle cleansers. Look for soothing ingredients in your skin care products. Often, when a patient improves the barrier function of their skin, the itching resolves. For more severe cases a dermatologist can also write a prescription.



Avoid Triggers: Whenever trying a new product, apply it to your inner arm or lateral neck for a few days and see if there is any reaction before applying it all over the face or body. Most eczema patients also have concurrent allergic or irritant contact dermatitis (reactions on the skin when using certain fragrances or products). Avoidance of the offending products is important to keep the itching and eczema under control. Dress in loose cotton clothing and avoid wool and other irritating fabrics. Try not to let your child with eczema sleep in your bed at night to prevent sweating.

Common Eczema Symptoms

- Dry, sensitive skin
- Red, inflamed skin
- Dark colored patches
- Itchy rash - difficult to detect in infants, but sleeping disorders are an indication
- Rough, scaly and thickened skin
- Oozing eczema patches
- Scabs form on the patches



Most Common Triggers

Irritating products:

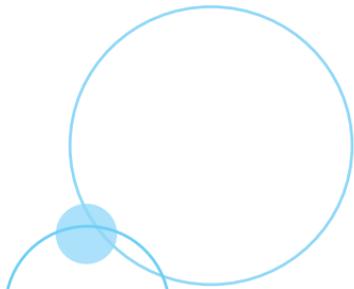
- Fragrances, soaps, laundry detergents
- Home cleaning products
- Irritating clothing: wool, synthetic fabrics, etc

Environmental factors:

- Dust, dust mites, and pollens, which are naturally present in the air
- Tobacco and pollution
- Changes in temperature
- Heat & sweat
- Very dry air

Lifestyle factors:

- Pets
- Emotional stress
- Food allergies
- Teething
- Changes in hormone levels



True or False?

Eczema is contagious.

TRUE **FALSE**

Eczema is not contagious. It is believed to be a combination of genes and environmental triggers that cause it.

Certain foods can aggravate eczema.

TRUE **FALSE**

An immediate reaction and redness may appear around the mouth during a meal. It is important to consult a doctor in order to determine whether the food contains a potential allergen.

Eczema disappears over time.

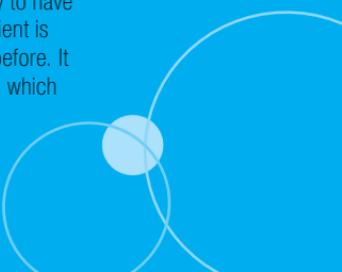
TRUE **FALSE**

Most children do 'grow out' of atopic dermatitis or eczema by adulthood. Meaning, the disease dissipates over time. However, for some patients it persists into adulthood.

If experiencing an allergic reaction, it can't be from a product you've been using forever.

TRUE **FALSE**

Patients with eczema have a higher incidence of irritant or allergic contact dermatitis in general, meaning they are more likely to have a reaction to a specific topical ingredient when that ingredient is applied to the skin, even if they have used it consistently before. It is also possible for companies to change their ingredients, which may cause allergic contact dermatitis.



Top 10 Q&A

- 1 Will this spread to the rest of the household?** While classic atopic eczema can have a familial predisposition – meaning multiple family members can be afflicted with the so-called “atopic triad”— eczema, allergic rhinitis (seasonal allergies) and asthma, eczema as a disease state is not contagious. However, the dry, scaly eczema patches are prone to Staphylococcus (“Staph”) infection, which is contagious. Therefore, eczema patients should be adequately treated.
- 2 Will my child ever get rid of eczema?** Most children do ‘grow out’ of atopic dermatitis or eczema by adulthood. Meaning, the disease dissipates over time. However, for some patients it persists into adulthood. For that reason, hydrating the skin with good barrier repair creams and emollients, possibly for a lifetime, is a good habit to start now.
- 3 How does eczema get infected?** Typically the intense scratching of itchy eczema patches leads to Staph infection. Staph can be under the fingernails and can seed a wound if the patient has been scratching. Research has also shown that many eczema patients are simply colonized with Staph bacteria. When the eczema flares, the Staph bacteria also increase leading to worsening of symptoms.
- 4 What is the difference between eczema and atopic dermatitis?** Atopic dermatitis is the most common type of eczema. It is chronic and inflammatory, usually caused by the immune systems response to an allergen or irritant inside or outside of the body.
- 5 How do I avoid Staph infection?** Keep nails trimmed short and avoid scratching the itchy areas. Wash hands frequently. Use mild cleansers on the eczema patches and keep the skin barrier as hydrated as possible.
- 6 Is this the same as psoriasis?** No. Eczema is a completely separate diagnosis and not related to psoriasis. They are not synonymous and are actually thought to be two different immune system pathways leading to each respective state. Having eczema does NOT mean you will get psoriasis.
- 7 Should I see a dermatologist for my eczema?** Yes. If you are experiencing dry, scaly, itchy skin, you should absolutely seek the care of a board-certified dermatologist. An easy way to find one in your area is to go to www.aad.org (American Academy of Dermatology) and click on the “Find a Dermatologist” button.
- 8 What should I look for in a moisturizer?** In general, ointments will be thick, greasy, and more solid (contain no water). They offer the most hydration, but are sticky and not as elegant to apply. Creams offer a nice alternative because they have excellent hydrating capacity, are a mixture of oil and water, and elegant upon application. Lotions contain the most water and are not as hydrating as creams and ointments.
- 9 Can you develop eczema as an adult?** A person can develop eczema at any age. However, classic atopic dermatitis usually begins in infancy or childhood and can sometimes persist into adulthood.
- 10 Why does eczema occur on specific parts of the body?** Some patients are prone to isolated patches of eczema, such as on the hands and feet. The term for this type of eczema is “dyshidrotic eczema,” and can even appear as small blisters on the hands. In the case of eyelid dermatitis, patients can react to a certain ingredient in a topically applied product such as cosmetics or eye cream.

Tips for Managing Dry Skin & Eczema:

1 Bathe or shower in **lukewarm** (not hot) water for no longer than 5 to 10 minutes



2 Use a **gentle**, soap-free and fragrance-free cleanser



3 Dry skin by **dabbing with a towel** instead of rubbing



4 **Keep your nails trimmed** to avoid further disrupting skin if scratching



5 Help prevent dry skin by hydrating with a moisturizer at least **twice a day**



Dr. Kristel Polder

is a board-certified dermatologist and skin care expert specializing in general medical dermatology, laser procedures, facial rejuvenation, injectables and non-surgical body contouring. She is the co-author of the book "Beautiful Skin Revealed: The Ultimate Guide to Better Skin" and serves as Clinical Assistant Professor for the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School.

Solutions for Dry Skin & Eczema

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