

# Atopic Eczema

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you or your child suffer from atopic eczema (*atopic* means 'sensitivity to allergens'). It also tells you when you should become concerned and when it's best to seek medical advice from a health professional. When talking of *eczema*, we mean *atopic eczema* in this fact sheet.

## Useful facts

- **How common is eczema?** You're not alone. Eczema is an often persistent or recurrent dry skin condition, affecting about two to 10 out of every 100 people in the UK.
- **What skin changes does eczema cause?** If you suffer from eczema, your skin can appear red, swollen, crusty and cracking, which often leads to itching and may even cause bleeding.
- **What's causing it?** Eczema tends to start in childhood. In addition to environmental factors, it often has an allergic component, which is why those suffering from eczema frequently also have asthma or hay fever, or both.

## What can I expect to happen?

- ✓ **How bad can eczema get?** The severity of eczema can range from mild to quite severe, with most sufferers lying somewhere in between.
- ✓ **Will I get cured?** Many children with eczema 'grow out' of it by the time they reach adolescence. But in some people, eczema may persist life-long. Fortunately, while there is no known cure, many effective treatments are available to alleviate your symptoms and reduce inflammation.

## What can I do myself to get better – now and in the future?

- ✓ **Avoid too much soap** Avoid frequent use of soap and bubble bath, as both can dry out the skin.
- ✓ **Avoid scratching** Whenever possible, avoid scratching your skin with the fingernails – even if it's tempting. Instead, rub itchy patches gently with your fingertips.
- ✓ **Avoid temperature extremes** Hot and cold temperatures may also make your eczema worse. So dress appropriately for hot and cold environments, or try and avoid temperature extremes altogether.

*Continued overleaf*



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- ✓ **Use non-irritant garments** Synthetic garments can trigger eczema, so you may prefer wearing clothes made out of cotton or other natural materials.
- ✓ **Moisturisers** Eczema causes the skin to become dry, and the dryer the skin becomes, the higher the chances that your symptoms will get worse. So try to keep your skin as hydrated and smooth as possible by using your moisturising creams or ointments liberally.
- ✓ **Inflammation and flare-ups** There's a lot you can do to relieve symptoms if your eczema gets worse. Check out the **NHS Choices** website ([http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/eczema-\(atopic\)/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/eczema-(atopic)/Pages/Introduction.aspx)) for further information on how you can treat and prevent eczema. Remember that your pharmacist can also help you with assessing and treating your symptoms.
- ✓ **Detergents** Avoid using fabric conditioners and use non-biological washing detergents.

### When should I seek medical help?

*Rarely*, eczema needs more urgent assessment and treatment. Contact your GP Surgery if you notice any of the following:

- **Blistery rash** You develop a blistery rash (which may be due to a widespread infection with the *herpes simplex virus*).
- **Spread** Larger areas of your body, such as most of your chest, back, or limbs become dry and/or red.
- **Reduced quality of life** Your skin problems severely impair your quality of life.
- **Infection** Your eczema looks angry and inflamed, which may suggest infection.

### Notes:

