

Atopic Dermatitis (AD)

Atopic dermatitis (AD), also known as eczema, is a skin condition where people have itchy, dry, and red skin. It typically begins in childhood, often within the first six months of life. It is caused by many factors. Simply put, skin serves as a barrier to keep things out and keep moisture in. Damage to the skin from eczema results in irritation and loss of skin moisture. The families of people with eczema are more likely to have asthma and seasonal allergies.

Common symptoms include intense itching, redness, and discolored skin. The skin can appear pink, red, or even darker or lighter than a person's normal skin tone. Skin can also become dry, scaly, and thickened from repeated scratching. Eczema is not contagious.

General skincare recommendations for patients with eczema include using lukewarm water while in the bath or shower and limiting them to 15 minutes. Patients should use gentle, fragrance-free soaps and shampoos (Example brands include Dove, Eucerin, Aveeno, Cetaphil, and Cerave). After the bath or shower, patients should pat themselves dry and apply topical moisturizers to damp skin. Moisturizers should also be utilized twice daily. Clothing should be cleaned with a "free and clear" detergent and an extra rinse cycle.

There are many medicines for eczema, however treatment often begins with topical medications including corticosteroids (such as hydrocortisone and triamcinolone). These medications should be applied twice daily as the patient continues to itch, and then once daily until thickened skin is smooth. Triamcinolone should never be applied to the face, armpits, groin, or skin folds. If patients are prescribed topical medications, they should be applied prior to the use of topical moisturizers. After affected areas have been treated, the skin is often darker or lighter in color. This will fade with time and is not permanent.

It is important to understand that atopic dermatitis cannot be cured, but it can be controlled with regular skin care and use of medications. The goal of eczema treatment is improvement in symptoms so that you or your child can fully participate in social and school activities, sleep without waking up from itching, while experiencing minimal to no side effects from medicines.

Speak to your dermatologist to learn more about eczema and treatment options.