

What is eczema?

- Eczema is a common skin disease.
- It includes different types of dermatitis, or inflamed (red, itchy rash) skin.

Illini Pediatrics, LLC
Joseph E. Cangas, M.D.
107 N. Main St, Ste 2B
Columbia, IL 62236
(618) 281-HEAL (4325)

What causes eczema?

- The exact cause of eczema is not known.
- If a parent has eczema, allergies, or asthma, their children are more like to have eczema.
- Symptoms may be triggered by contact with materials such as dust, down comforters, feathers, wool, or perfumed lotions. Sweaty activities, stress, or quick changes of temperature also may cause itching.
- Very rarely, symptoms can be triggered by an allergic reaction to a food or pet. Avoiding the food or pet may improve symptoms but won't cure the eczema.
- Triggers and symptoms are different for each person.

Who can get eczema?

- Anyone can have eczema, but it is most common in infants and young adults.
- It often runs in families. If a parent has eczema, allergies, or asthma, their child is likely to have eczema.

What are the symptoms of eczema?

- Red, itchy skin.
- Rash.
- Blisters or bumps that itch and ooze.
- Scaly, brownish, thick skin.
- Patches can be anywhere but usually are on the face, scalp, and behind the ears.
- The rash is sometimes on the fingers, palms, back of the hands, and on the elbows, knees, and feet.
- People with eczema feel the need to scratch and rub their skin.
- Itching is usually worst at night.
- If the child scratches until the skin breaks or bleeds, the skin could get infected.
- Babies with eczema usually do not show symptoms until they are 6 weeks or older.
- Most rashes disappear after a few days. A rash caused by eczema may go away for a short time but will usually come back.
- Illness, such as a cold, often makes symptoms worse.

Is eczema contagious?

- No. It is not contagious.

How is eczema treated?

- Symptoms can be treated best if the disease is diagnosed early.
- Talk to the doctor or a dermatologist (skin doctor) if you believe your child has eczema. The doctor will tell you what treatment is best.
- Eczema is sometimes improved by avoiding contact with certain materials, such as dust, down comforters, feathers, wool, and perfumed lotions.
- Soaking in a bath of body temperature water might help keep the skin moist and soft and stop itching. Dry off by patting the skin with a towel. Do not rub. Put cream on your skin immediately after drying off.
- Avoiding sweaty activities, stress, and quick changes of temperature may also help.
- The doctor might recommend creams, ointments, or lotions to ease symptoms. These need to be applied very often throughout the day.

- Oral medications (by mouth) are sometimes helpful.
- In rare cases, a doctor might recommend ultraviolet light treatments (putting skin under special lights).
- Discourage your child from scratching her skin.

How long does eczema last?

- Eczema usually improves as children get older. Most cases improve by the age of 25.
- Some people have it all their lives.

How can eczema be prevented?

Having eczema can't be prevented, but taking certain measures often helps prevent some of the symptoms:

- If your child has eczema, try to avoid things that could irritate her skin.
- Avoid wool. Wearing clothes made of cotton is usually best.
- Children with eczema may need to use a mild soap such as Dove, Oil of Olay, Aveeno, or Cetaphil.
- Body temperature water is best for baths and washing hands. Hot water will dry the skin out and make symptoms worse.
- Cold air can dry the skin out and make eczema worse. Children with eczema on their hands should wear gloves when they go outside in winter.
- Avoid contact with household cleaners. If your child with eczema is helping you clean, have her wear gloves.
- Use creams, ointments, or lotion many times throughout the day to keep the skin soft. Use cream that is not perfumed. Some doctors suggest using a petroleum jelly, such as Vaseline.
- Skin can get especially dry in the winter. Be sure to use moisturizer.
- Avoid hot and sweaty activities and places. Use light sheets and blankets on your child's bed.
- If stress triggers the itching in your child, try to avoid daily activities that cause stress.

When should I call the doctor?

- Call the doctor if your child's eczema does not improve after 3 weeks of treatment.
- If you believe that a food is triggering your child's eczema, talk to a doctor.
- Call the doctor if your child has both a fever and a rash.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's condition.

Quick Answers

- Eczema is a common skin disease that includes different types of inflamed (red, itchy rash) skin.
- The symptoms of eczema are sometimes triggered by contact with materials such as dust or perfumed lotions. Sweaty activities, stress, or quick changes of temperature also may cause itching.
- If a parent has eczema, allergies, or asthma, their child is more likely to have eczema.
- The symptoms of eczema can include red, itchy skin, rash, blisters or bumps that itch and ooze, or scaly, brownish, thick skin.
- Eczema is not contagious.
- The doctor might recommend creams or medication to ease the symptoms of eczema.
- Eczema usually improves as children get older.
- If your child has eczema, try to avoid things that could irritate her skin.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's condition.

References

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