



Eczema and Dry Skin

What You Can Do

Eczema

Eczema is a group of skin disorders. Atopic dermatitis is the most common type of eczema. It causes rashes that are red and swollen (inflamed), flaky, and very itchy.

An eczema rash can also:

- Have red bumps or blisters that break and crust over.
- Get infected, especially if you scratch it often.

Eczema typically starts in babies or young children. It may improve by age 6 or clear up completely during puberty. It can also occur in adults and be ongoing (chronic). People who have asthma, hay fever, or other allergies are more likely to have eczema.

In children rashes can occur on the face, scalp, buttocks, thighs, and torso.

Adults may also have eczema on their neck, inside of elbows, and behind the knees. Eczema can affect the hands or feet when people have frequent contact with chemical products or other harsh substances.

Home care

You can use self-care at home to relieve eczema symptoms. The first step is to regularly cleanse and moisturize your dry skin. Always use gentle, nonirritating products.

You can use these steps to protect your skin and recover from eczema.

- Use an antihistamine (Benadryl) (pills taken by mouth) to relieve itching. This can help you relax and sleep at night (and nap, if needed).
- Avoid topical antihistamine and antiseptic creams and sprays, which irritate the skin.
- Use a humidifier in your bedroom.
- Avoid or protect your skin from irritants or allergens (products containing chemicals, strong perfumes, and fabrics such as wool and acrylics). Wear gloves when doing dishes, for example.
- Wash clothes and bedding with mild, fragrance-free detergent. Rinse at least twice. Skip fabric softener if it's irritating.

How to relieve itching due to eczema and dry skin

- Keep the itchy area cool and wet. Use a compress soaked in ice water, for example.
- Take an oatmeal bath. Wrap one cup of oatmeal in a cotton cloth and boil as you would to cook it. Use this as a sponge and take a bath in lukewarm water. Don't use soap. (Aveeno colloidal oatmeal bath can be used.)
- Use calamine lotion to relieve poison ivy or oak rashes.
- For small itchy areas, use over-the-counter 1-percent hydrocortisone cream or ointment. Use very small amounts on your face or genitals. If itching is severe, ask your doctor for a stronger cream.
- Prevent scratching by keeping nails short or wearing gloves at night.
- Wear cotton clothing next to your skin (avoid wool and acrylic fabrics).

Dry skin

Dry, itchy, flaky skin is common. When skin loses water into the air through sweating or other evaporation, your skin can become very dry. This can be caused by:

- Dry indoor air, especially during winter when indoor heat is used.
- Use of strong soaps and hot water for bathing.
- Lower humidity during winter.

How to prevent dry skin

- Use humidifiers in several rooms, especially the bedroom.
- Limit sun exposure, especially midday (when UV rays are intense).
- Avoid hot showers and baths. This reduces natural skin oils you need to keep the skin moisturized.
- Limit or avoid perfumes and perfumed products.

How to moisturize if you have eczema or dry skin

- Take daily baths or showers with cool or lukewarm (not hot) water. Use a gentle soap (Dove, Basis, Aveeno, Neutrogena) or a nonsoap cleanser (Cetaphil or Aveeno). Avoid deodorant or lye (Ivory) soap.
- After bathing, pat skin dry with a towel. Don't rub.
- Apply a lubricating cream or ointment (Vaseline, Aquaphor, Aveeno, Cetaphil) while the skin is still damp to seal in moisture. Reapply often. To heal very dry hands or feet, apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly to these areas and wear cotton gloves or cotton socks to bed.

When to call us

Call your doctor at our 24/7 Appointment and Advice Call Center at **866-454-8855** if you have **eczema** along with:

- Sores that are crusty or leak fluid. They may be infected.
- A red, patchy face rash along with joint pain and fever.
- Itching that interferes with sleep and isn't helped by home care.

Also call your doctor if you have **dry skin** and:

- Itching all over your body without an obvious cause or rash.
- Badly broken skin due to scratching.

We're here to help

For more information on managing eczema and dry skin, search:



My Doctor Online
kp.org/mydoctor



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

© 2002, The Permanente Medical Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Health Engagement Consulting Services.
011061-276 (Revised 04/24) RL 6.8