

Health Care Education Eczema



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And when I am sick, then He heals me. - - - Al Quran – Ash-Shuraa, Verse 26:80

Eczema

What is Eczema? Eczema is term for a group of medical conditions that cause the skin to become inflamed or irritated.

Who gets eczema? Eczema occurs in both children and adults, but usually appears during infancy. Although there is no known cause for the disease, it often affects people with a family history of allergies.

Those who are genetically predisposed (family history) and then exposed to environmental triggers may develop eczema.

areas may initially appear reddish and then turn brown. Among darker-skinned people, eczema can affect pigmentation, making the affected area lighter or darker.

In infants, the itchy rash can produce an oozing, crusting condition that occurs mainly on the face and scalp, but patches may appear anywhere.

What causes Eczema? The exact cause of eczema is unknown, but it's thought to be linked to an overactive response by the body's immune system to an irritant. It is this response that causes the symptoms of the disease.



What are the symptoms? No matter which part of the skin is affected, eczema is almost always itchy. Sometimes the itching will start before the rash appears. The rash most commonly occurs on the face, knees, hands or feet. It may also affect other areas as well.

Affected areas usually appear very dry, thickened or scaly. In fair-skinned people, these

In addition, eczema is commonly found in families with a history of other allergies or asthma. Some people may suffer "flare-ups" of the itchy rash in response to certain substances or conditions. For some, coming into contact with rough or coarse materials may cause the skin to become itchy. For others, feeling too hot or too cold, exposure to certain household products like soap or detergent, or coming into contact with animal dandruff may cause an outbreak. Upper respiratory infections or colds may also be triggers. Stress may cause the condition to worsen.

How is Eczema diagnosed? A pediatrician, dermatologist or your primary care provider can make a diagnosis of eczema. Since many people with eczema also suffer from allergies, your doctor may perform allergy tests to determine possible irritants or triggers. Children with eczema are especially likely to be tested for allergies.

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How is Eczema treated? The goal of treatment is to relieve and prevent itching, which can lead to infection. Since the disease makes skin dry and itchy, lotions and creams are recommended to keep the skin moist. These solutions are usually applied when the skin is damp, such as after bathing, to help the skin retain moisture. Cold compresses may also be used to relieve itching.

Over-the-counter or prescription creams and ointments containing corticosteroids, such as hydrocortisone, are often prescribed to reduce inflammation. For severe cases, your doctor may prescribe oral corticosteroids. In addition, if the affected area becomes infected, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to kill the infection-causing bacteria.

Other treatments include antihistamines to reduce severe itching, tar treatments (chemicals

designed to reduce itching), phototherapy (therapy using ultraviolet light applied to the skin) and the drug cyclosporine for people whose condition doesn't respond to other treatments.

How can flare-ups be prevented? Eczema outbreaks can usually be avoided or the severity lessened by following these simple tips.

- Moisturize frequently
- Avoid sudden changes in temperature or humidity
- Avoid sweating or overheating
- Reduce stress
- Avoid scratchy materials, such as wool
- Avoid harsh soaps, detergents and solvents
- Avoid environmental factors that trigger allergies (for example, pollen, mold, dust mites, and animal dandruff)
- Be aware of any foods that may cause an outbreak and avoid those foods

Sources: Reviewed by the doctors at The Cleveland Clinic Department of Pulmonary, Allergy and Critical Care Medicine:
Edited by Cynthia Haines, MD, WebMD, April 2005.