



Eczema - Baby & Children

Dermatitis and Eczema are distressing conditions for adults, so when your baby or toddler suffers, it is a continual cycle of itching and scratching and they are too little to understand that they must not scratch. The skin reddens and bleeds and eventually it may become infected, but still they scratch!

For parents, the problem eats away at the heart of the family as you constantly pay attention to your child's skin. You are regularly applying creams and ointments and taking endless trips to the doctors. Children with eczema are likely to experience a more disturbed night's sleep as they struggle with the urge to scratch their skin.

According to The National Eczema Society as many as one in twelve adults and one in five children suffer from eczema. This common condition is made worse by the chemical cocktail of preservatives, fragrances and harsh emulsifying agents in many modern skincare products. There are other factors that may be linked to the increase of eczema cases such as changes in climate, diet or pollution. A baby's skin (and a child's) is so much thinner than adults, so it is important to choose the right skincare products for infants. Atopic eczema has become more common in recent years, mainly affecting children. The most common area affected are next to skin creases such as the front of the elbows and wrists, backs of knees and around the neck. However any areas of skin may be affected, with the face commonly affected in babies. Many women can have eczema or skin problems during their pregnancy, while never suffering before. We are more and more concerned about the chemicals we put into and onto our bodies and how these can pass on to our unborn baby. At Pure and Gentle SkinCare our products contain a high percentage of natural and active ingredients, and many are free from the most common skin irritants.

Eczema and itching

Eczema is an itchy condition as most parents who have a child with atopic eczema know only too well. This is because the inflammation in the skin irritates the nerve endings in the skin. The itch of eczema stops or goes down when the eczema is better. *Here are some ideas that may help to reduce your child's scratching:*

1. Never say "stop scratching!". All this does is make your child more anxious which will make them want to scratch more when they are out of your sight. All advice needs to be positive and active.
2. Give praise when there is no scratching.
3. Try and make your child aware of how often they scratch their skin e.g. by getting them to make a note of how often they scratch their skin in a little diary. Making your child aware of how often they scratch their skin is often the first step in reversing the habit.
4. When your child feels the urge to scratch, teach your child a different way of dealing with the itch such as clenching the fist tightly for 30 seconds or pinching or tapping the skin where it itches. This takes the sensation of itch away without damaging the skin. This requires practice and a lot of encouragement.
5. It might be useful to use a star or sticker chart to praise your child for not scratching. You can either make a chart yourself, or buy a calendar with a space for each day on which your child could put the stars or stickers.
6. If you find that your child tends to scratch far more during certain times, for example when watching television or reading, you need to make your child aware of this and perhaps consider awarding extra stars for success at this especially difficult times.
7. Be aware of the difficult situations where bouts of scratching tend to occur. Plan ahead for what to do after the shower or when dressing etc.
8. Put on creams quickly and never put them on less than 20 minutes before going to bed.
9. Undress or dress your child quickly to give them little or no chance of tearing at their skin. Play and talk with your child at bathtime and pat the skin dry with a towel afterwards rather than rub the skin.
10. Try diverting your child's attention in activities which tend to make scratching worse.

Reduce the damage caused by scratching

There will be times when despite your best efforts, your child will just have to scratch their skin. You or your child should not feel guilty about this. There are ways however of reducing the damage of scratching. The most simple is to keep your child's nails well trimmed so that they are less likely to cut the skin when scratching. If your child tends to tear at their skin during the night when half

asleep, then make it more difficult for your child to get at their skin e.g. by wearing a one-piece night suit. Using bandages to the limbs at night (such as wet wraps) is another way of giving your child's limbs a holiday from the damaging affects of scratching. There is also some therapeutic clothing such as DermaSilk which can be worn at night, these are available on the NHS from your doctor if your child has a severe condition or they are available from our on-line shop.

Eczema and moisturisers

Skin moisturisers (or emollients) are used for many types of skin problems. However they play a very important part in managing atopic eczema. Skin Care - when your baby is born it is important to keep things simple. They may have some areas of dry skin just like many babies but it is important that you avoid products that may irritate and dry the skin such as soaps, detergents, wool and extremes of temperature. Use a simple moisturiser such as DermaVeen or DermaSalve.

How do they work?

The smoothness and softness of the skin depends on the amount of water in the surface layer of the skin. This layer protects the rest of the skin from damage. In eczema, it is often broken, allowing moisture to escape and infections to enter through the skin. Emollients protect the outer layer of your skin by covering it with a protective film. This keeps the water in the skin where it is needed and also helps to keep infections and other harsh substances out. They may also help eczema by dampening down inflammation which may in turn reduce the need for steroid creams.

How often can they be used?

Ideally, emollients should be used at least twice daily. By all means, use them more often than this, especially on exposed areas of the skin such as the hand and face during the day time. Emollients should be applied to exposed areas of the skin before coming into contact with factors which might aggravate the eczema such as cold weather, swimming, wet/dusty activities at school/home such as painting or gardening. In babies, it is a good idea to protect the hands and cheeks with an emollient before mealtimes to prevent irritation from foods and drinks. It is a good idea to keep small pots/tubes of emollient at home, work and at school for regular use.

A good time to apply emollients is after bathing when the skin has cooled (5-10 mins) because this is when the water content of the skin is highest. Emollients are very safe and cannot be over used. Very occasionally, creams may sting the skin when first applied to very dry skin. This normally settles after a few days of treatment, but if it persists, please tell your doctor as it is possible that your child is reacting to a preservative used in cream preparations.

What about bath additives and soap substitutes?

Bath additives (such as a bath oil) may be helpful for the dry skin of eczema. These are liquids which can be poured into the bath and will help to prevent the loss of moisture from the skin. They can make the bath slippery, so always use a non slip mat.

Bubble baths, gels and cosmetics are best avoided as they can irritate the skin. Harsh soaps are best avoided in eczema.

Top Tips for help with eczema:

- Avoid wool next to the skin - use natural fabrics such as silk
- Keep nails short to avoid them breaking the skin when scratching
- Avoid soaps, use a substitute - try a soap free wash (ie. DermaVeen Soap free wash or Essential Care Gentle Shampoo and wash)
- Always moisturise, even when the eczema is under control. especially after swimming or bathing
- Keep the bedroom cool at night and use a lightweight cotton sheet or DermaSilk children's pyjamas

Disclaimer

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this leaflet is accurate, not every treatment will be suitable or effective for every person. All content within Pure and Gentle SkinCare is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. Pure and Gentle SkinCare is not responsible or liable for any diagnosis made by a user based on the content of Pure and Gentle SkinCare website or advisers. Always consult your own GP if you're in any way concerned about your health as he or she will be able to advise in greater detail.

Other helpful information sites

www.talkeczema.com - patient support and information site for individuals and families living with the day to day misery of eczema.

www.eczema.org - the eczema society provide information and help for people suffering with eczema

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk - telephone 0845 4647 to speak to an adviser or nurse

www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk - helpful advise on many different types of skin problems