PATIENT PERSPECTIVES

What is atopic dermatitis?

Atopic dermatitis is also called eczema. Eczema is a common skin problem in kids. Eczema usually causes a dry, itchy rash. Eczema usually lasts many years. During this time, the rash may have ups and downs, where it sometimes gets better or worse.

WHAT CAUSES ECZEMA?

There are many factors that cause eczema. These include:

- **SKIN BARRIER**
  In children with eczema, the skin is not sealed up as well as it should be. This makes the skin drier. It also lets irritating things get into the skin more easily. People often think of this as "sensitive skin."
- **GENETICS**
  Eczema often runs in families.
- **IMMUNE SYSTEM**
  The immune system is supposed to fight off germs. In people with eczema, it can be too active and react to things outside your body.
- **ENVIRONMENT TRIGGERS**
  Things like dry air, weather change, harsh soaps, and fragrances can make eczema worse.

It's important to know that **eczema is not caused by a food allergy.** Avoiding certain foods without a doctor's advice can create more problems.

WHAT DOES ECZEMA LOOK LIKE?

Eczema is an itchy rash that feels rough or dry. In lighter skin types, eczema usually looks pink or red. In darker skin types, it might look red, purple, or brown. It is almost always itchy.

Eczema is diagnosed by a doctor looking at your child's skin. Special tests are usually not needed.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TREAT ECZEMA?

Eczema is very itchy. Kids with eczema are often very uncomfortable due to the itch.

Not treating eczema can cause more problems, like:

Poor sleep and behavior concerns

- Itching can get worse at night making it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep.
- Sleep is important for development. Kids with untreated eczema will often feel tired during the day, which affects their mood and schoolwork.

Infection

- When a child scratches a lot, the skin can open up and let germs in.
- Skin scratches can sometimes lead to a skin infection where the skin becomes red, swollen, warm, and even pus-filled. If you see these signs, it's important to see a doctor right away.
- Even mild skin infection can make it harder to clear eczema.

HOW IS ECZEMA TREATED?

There is no cure for eczema. But there are many treatments to keep it under control.

The most important way to help clear eczema is to keep the skin moisturized with **gentle skin care:**

- ☐ Take a short bath or shower once a day or every other day in warm (not hot) water. A quick bath or shower can hydrate the skin, as long as you follow all the gentle skin care steps.
- ☐ Use only a little bit of gentle, fragrance-free soap. Only use soap on dirty areas of skin, like behind ears, neck, armpits, and genital area.
- ☐ Gently pat skin dry with a towel after bathing.
- ☐ While the skin is still damp, apply a fragrance-free, thick cream or ointment moisturizer all over.

In addition to gentle skin care, here are **other ways to treat eczema:**

1 Avoid triggers

Some things can make eczema worse. Common triggers are:

- » Harsh soaps
- » Fragrance (in soaps, moisturizers, laundry detergents)
- » Not using a moisturizer
- » Cigarette smoke
- » Pollution
- » Weather change
- » Recent illness
- » Sweat
- » Emotional stress

2 Topical steroids

These are applied directly on the rash. They help calm the skin rash. Use them exactly as your doctor tells you.

3 Topical non-steroids

These medicines are also applied directly on the rash.

4 Antihistamines

Medications taken by mouth to help with itch.

5 Systemic medicine

Some eczema does not go away with topical medicines. For these kids, doctors may prescribe a medicine that works from the inside of the body. This could be a liquid, pill, or shot.

6 Phototherapy

This is a special type of light that shines on the skin to help clear the eczema. This is usually done in the doctor's office.

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