

ECZEMA MANAGEMENT TIPS

Although eczema cannot be cured, good management can significantly reduce the impact that it has on your life. Every person's eczema experience is unique. Some things that help one person may not help another.



Cooling

When skin becomes hot, the blood vessels in the skin temporarily enlarge. This allows heat in the blood to move away from the body more quickly. The skin appears red. Initially it feels a lot hotter. Hot skin loses more water and will make your dry skin worse. Try some of these tips to cool the skin:

- Keep a tube of moisturiser in the fridge. When your skin is really hot and itchy, applying a cool cream straight from the fridge is very soothing.
- Wear breathable clothing with natural fibres such as cotton. Synthetic fabrics can prevent heat and sweat from moving away from the body.
- Apply an ice pack or ice cubes covered with a damp cloth to the skin. This can help to reduce itching.
- In hot summers, switch to a lotion or light cream during the middle of the day. When the air is hot and humid, thick creams and ointments can make it harder for the skin to cool down. Save these for night and early morning.
- Exercise in the morning or early evening when the temperature is cooler.
- After exercise, wash as soon as possible to remove irritating sweat and cool the body down.
- Wash in warm, not hot water.



Broken skin

Skin is your suit of armour. As soon as there are breaks in it, germs (bacteria, yeasts and viruses) can get in. You might think the scratches and cracks are so tiny they are not worth worrying about. Germs though, are smaller than this full stop right here. Try some of these tips to help reduce the risk:

- Keep fingernails short to limit damage from scratching and clean under nails.
- Wash hands before applying moisturisers.
- Keep skin thoroughly moisturised to prevent excessive dryness and cracking.
- As soon as a scratch or skin split occurs, apply an antibacterial ointment or gel to encourage the wound to heal and reduce the risk of infection.
- Limit exposure to people who have cold sores, impetigo (school sores), ringworm and Molluscum contagiosum (a rare virus). These infections can be more severe in people with eczema. If you think you have been infected, see your doctor.
- For infants and children, use clothing specially designed to prevent skin damage from scratching. These usually have built in mittens or one piece outfits.



Skin moisture

One of the hallmarks of eczema is dry, itchy skin. People with eczema do not have enough of the oily substance that surrounds skin cells and they lose a lot more water through their skin. Moisturising your skin is one of the most important things that you can do to lessen the impact that eczema has. Here are some tips for maximising skin moisture:

- Use a soap-free wash specially formulated for eczematous skin.
- After washing, gently pat the skin dry instead of vigorous rubbing.
- Moisturise your skin straight after washing. Apply in the direction of the hair growth to minimise clogging of hair follicles as this can lead to infection.
- Layer moisturisers for maximum hydration. Apply a lotion first to provide water to the skin. Follow with a richer cream or ointment, containing oils, that will help lock in the moisture.
- If using a steroid cream, wait 15 minutes after applying moisturiser.
- Moisturise the whole body even when skin is clear.



Triggers

Many factors, known as triggers, can make eczema worse or cause it to suddenly flare up. Because people with eczema have a damaged skin barrier, some triggers are able to pass through the outer layer of skin (epidermis) to the deeper layer (dermis) and cause the body to react. Examples of triggers are: dust mites, animal dander, pollen, heat, environmental chemicals or certain foods. For each individual, these will be different. Eliminating or minimising exposure to triggers can help.

- Try to keep a diary of flare-ups. Note: the time of year, pollens that are about, personal care products used, foods eaten etc.
- Avoid soap and foaming body washes as these are usually alkaline and contain substances that damage the oily coating around skin cells. Also avoid personal care products with fragrances, and known sensitising ingredients.
- If sleeping in bunks, sleep on the top bunk if possible to reduce the amount of dust mites and dust falling on the lower bed.
- Use dust mite covers on pillows, mattresses and bedding.
- Wash bedding and soft toys in hot water once per week to reduce dust mite numbers.
- Damp dust regularly.
- Use gloves when cleaning or doing dishes.
- Avoid foods that aggravate your eczema. Consult a dietitian before eliminating a group of foods to ensure you receive adequate nutrients.
- Use plant based washing powders designed for people with sensitive skin. Avoid products with added fragrance.
- Wash new clothing and bedding before use to remove chemicals from manufacturing.
- Cut tags off clothing. These can irritate sensitive skin.



Supplements and healthy eating

Skin that is often inflamed and broken requires extra nutrients to heal. Eating a balanced diet rich in essential oils, antioxidants and nourishing nutrients.

- Omegas-3's are nourishing oils that, among other things, has anti-inflammatory properties and promote healthy skin. Our bodies can't make them, we need to include them in our diet. If possible, eat oily fish such as salmon or sardines twice a week. For vegetarians, sources such as walnuts and flaxseeds can be useful. Omega-3 supplements can be considered for people who are unable to get sufficient amounts in their diet.
- Reduce the amount of Omega-6's in the diet. They are found in processed foods. These fatty acids can contribute to inflammation in the body if we consume more Omega-6's than Omega-3's.
- Probiotics are helpful bacteria that promote a healthy digestive tract and contribute to immunity. Fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles and yoghurt are good sources of probiotics. If supplementing, there are many different strains of bacteria so check that the product you choose has strains that are researched for eczema prone skin.