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Spring Cleaning



Is your home healthy?

Indoor allergens and other irritants can trigger the signs and symptoms of atopic dermatitis. Taking some precautions around the home can help prevent flare-ups:

1 – Control Dust Mites.

Some studies suggest that reducing the presence of dust mites can reduce eczema symptoms. This is what can be done to control dust mites in the bedroom:

- Eliminate carpeting, rugs and blinds.
- Limit upholstered furniture.
- Cover box spring and mattress in plastic zippered covers.
- Clean the room thoroughly each week. This should include wiping the floor, furniture, tops of doors, window frames and sills with a damp cloth.
- Wash all bed clothes and curtains at least once a week in water that is 130° F or hotter.
- Air the room thoroughly after cleaning.
- Keep all animals with fur or feathers out of the bedroom.

2 – Keep the humidity level between 45% and 60%.

Dehumidifiers and humidifiers can keep humidity levels at desired levels. Use a hygrometer, a device that measures humidity, to monitor the amount of moisture in the air.

3 – Avoid contact with pets that have fur or feathers.

When fur and feathers come into contact with skin, they can cause a flare-up. Pet dander is another common trigger. Be sure to keep pets with fur or feathers out of the bedroom.

4 – Avoid contact with harsh dish-washing products and household cleaners.

Look for natural alternatives to bleaches and other cleaners that contain harsh chemicals. If you must use cleansers, wear protective gloves. Wearing cotton gloves under rubber gloves can help prevent a flare-up if you have an allergy to latex.



If you are caring for a child with eczema it's also very important to reduce allergens and irritants in the child's bedroom that might provoke flare-ups:

- Keep toys that will accumulate dust out of the child's bedroom
- Avoid stuffed toys
- Use only washable toys of wood, rubber, metal, or plastic
- Store toys in a closed toy box or chest

The comfort of cotton



Wool and some synthetic fabrics can irritate the skin of eczema patients. Many people with sensitive skin feel better in clothes made of cotton or a cotton blend, free from unnecessary chemical finishes. Also look for soft ribbed edges and labels that can be removed. Wear soft, smooth materials next to your skin, preferably

100 per cent cotton. Cotton also allows the skin to breathe, unlike many synthetic materials.

Some laundry detergents or fabric conditioners can lead to skin irritation. Rinse clothes thoroughly after washing.

Avoid wool. It may be the warmest natural material around, but it can also irritate the skin, starting off the itch-scratch-rash cycle.

Ask the Doctor

Question:

Why is it so important to moisturize?

Answer:

It is important because moisturizers facilitate the trapping of water in the skin and the prevention of excess water loss from the skin. Even though they are often not aware of it, patients with atopic dermatitis have dry skin all year round. That is because the protective barrier of their skin (which is known as the stratum corneum) has lost its ability to retain moisture. As a result, they may experience itching, burning, stinging and a feeling of tightness. Some experts believe that the barrier function of the stratum corneum fluctuates with disease activity and that severely dry skin may even drive the disease. Abnormalities in the barrier function allow irritants and aeroallergens to penetrate the skin more easily, causing more inflammation.

That barrier abnormality is associated with a reduction in the amounts of lipids (fats) in the stratum corneum. The lipids are necessary to trap water and prevent excess water loss. The reduction in lipids results in a water loss not only in irritated skin, but even in skin that looks normal to the naked eye.

The dryness of the skin can be aggravated by a number of factors. Environmental factors such as cold or dry climates are obvious. The use of soaps and harsh cleansers also cause the skin to lose its ability to retain moisture.

The aim of treating dry skin with moisturizers is to restore the epidermal barrier of the skin and to maintain stratum corneum hydration.

There are many types of moisturizers, but they work through two main types of mechanism: an “occlusive” action and/or a “humectant” action. Occlusive moisturizers (such as Petrolatum or “Vaseline”) are composed of oily substances that act to prevent the evaporation of moisture from the skin by forming a greasy film that slows transepidermal water loss (TEWL or evaporation of water from the skin).

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Other moisturizing ingredients include mineral oil, silicones such as dimethicone, and vegetable and animal fats such as cocoa butter, and lanolin. Some atopic individuals may have a problem with lanolin.

Humectant moisturizers work differently: Instead of trapping water, they attract water from deeper skin layers to the stratum corneum. Humectants include glycerin, sorbitol, urea, sodium lactate, hyaluronic acid, and propylene glycol. Moisturizers that contain only humectants will increase TEWL when applied to a damaged or dehydrated stratum corneum, because they do not prevent the hydrated stratum corneum from losing its water content into the atmosphere. That is why most good moisturizers have a humectant and an occlusive ingredient to block TEWL.

Some things to do to keep skin moist:

1. Use a humidifier with relative humidity setting of 45-60%.
2. Keep room temperature as low as tolerated and comfortable.
3. Bathe in warm (not hot) water for 10 minutes daily to hydrate the skin.
4. Use an emulsifying bath oil in the water, but be careful as the tub will be slippery.
5. Avoid exposure to harsh soaps, and other drying agents such as powders.
6. Use moisturizers twice daily, ideally after the bath while the skin is still damp (within 3 minutes of patting skin dry).

Perfume can provoke flare-ups



Did you know that a number of perfumes can provoke allergic eczema?

People with eczema should be very cautious in their choice of cosmetic products. Many of the fragrances found in soap, shampoo, creams, and perfumes may cause allergic reactions. Allergic eczema, also known as allergic contact dermatitis, is a red, itchy reaction in which the skin has come into contact with a substance that the immune system recognizes as foreign, such as certain preservatives in creams and lotions. Certain baby cleansing products should also be avoided as they may be highly perfumed. Hypoallergenic products or neutral pH products that contain no colour or perfume are preferred.

The origin of the flare



Numerous substances have been identified as itch "triggers" in patients with eczema. These triggers may vary from person to person. Often it may be difficult to identify the exact cause of a flare-up. For some people, rough or coarse materials (such as wool) coming into contact with the skin can cause a flare. For others, feeling too hot and/or sweating can result in an outbreak. Certain soaps, detergents, disinfectants, contact with juices from fresh fruits and meats as well as dust mites, animal saliva and danders can also lead to episodes of itch and redness. Of course, stress may also cause, or aggravate, flare-ups as well.

Myth: Eczema is infectious

Fact: If the skin is scratched until it breaks, it may well become infected and this, in turn, may make the eczema worse. However, eczema itself is not infectious and it cannot be transmitted from person to person.



Sign me up so I can receive upcoming information from the EASE program

Send me information by mail email

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Email: _____

My information can be provided to Astellas Pharma Canada, Inc. to assist with the EASE Program development

We use this information to send you only the information you request. We will never intentionally disclose any personal identification information about you as an individual user to any third party without having received your permission. To remove your name from the mailing list, write to AISE-EASE@meca.ca or fax your request to (514) 288-5680.

Already a member of the EASE program? We still want to learn more about you!

1. Tell us about yourself

- I have been diagnosed with eczema
- I have a child diagnosed with eczema
- Other, please specify:

3. Tell us your best tip for stopping the itch caused by eczema

2. Which of the following activities does eczema prevent you (or your child/other family member/friend) from doing?


- Swimming
- Sunbathing
- Applying makeup
- Having a pet
- Eating some of the foods you like
- Wearing shorts, skirts and t-shirts

4. Would you be interested in sharing your story with other people suffering from eczema?


- Yes
- No


Simply fold this page to show the EASE address on one side and seal it. No need for a stamp, just toss in the mailbox — we are looking forward to hearing from you soon!


Check which of the following EASE material you would like to receive

 **Eczema - It's Time To Take Control**
A comprehensive 36-page booklet on treatments, symptoms, skin care and patient support.

Also available in Mandarin and Punjabi

 **The Eczema Self-Test**
A double-sided illustrated tip card on eczema, its symptoms, causes and methods of control.

 **But It Itches So Much!**
A colourful brochure with practical information for parents and children with eczema.

 **Penny's EGGS-im-ah story book**
An illustrated children's book explaining atopic dermatitis.

Stress reduction may help control flare-ups

Many eczema patients find that reducing stress makes controlling their eczema much easier. In fact, studies show that keeping calm and having a positive outlook may be one of the best ways to keep eczema under control. However, in today's fast-paced world, managing stress can be a challenge, even for children. Here are some time-tested techniques that can help effectively manage the stress of everyday life:



- **Maintain your treatment regimen.** When life becomes especially hectic, it is important to comply with your treatment regimen to help avoid a flare-up.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adequate sleep reduces stress and gives skin time to rejuvenate.
- **Relax your mind.** Deep breathing, progressive relaxation, visualization, yoga, meditation, or listening to a relaxation CD can help.
- **Make time for yourself.** Create a list of things you enjoy, such as a walk, or curling up with a book. Try to find time everyday to do something you enjoy.

The difference between eczema and atopic dermatitis

Eczema is a general term encompassing various types of inflamed skin conditions. One of the most common forms of eczema is atopic dermatitis (or "atopic eczema"). Approximately 10 percent to 20 percent of the world population is affected by this chronic, relapsing, and very itchy rash at some point during childhood. Fortunately, many children with eczema find that the disease clears and often disappears as they get older.

In general, atopic dermatitis will come and go; although its cause is unknown, the condition appears to be an abnormal response by the body's immune system. In people who have eczema, the inflammatory response to irritating substances is excessive, resulting in red, irritated skin. However, eczema is not contagious and, although it cannot be cured, it can be well-controlled by following a doctor-recommended treatment plan and avoiding triggers.



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