

What is atopic eczema and its treatment?

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Atopic eczema or dermatitis is a red, scaly, itchy and sometimes weeping skin condition. Atopy means an allergic condition that runs in families and includes problems such as asthma, hayfever, skin eczema and skin sensitivities. It affects 10% of population. It is not contagious.

What are the symptoms?

In mild cases, the skin is red, itchy, scaly and covers small areas. In infants, it starts on the face and scalp. In severe cases, it covers large areas, very itchy and starts to weep. The child may be very irritable.

What ages are affected?

It usually starts from any age, often before 12 months. It improves from one to 2 years but it can persist in areas such as bends of elbows and knees, face, neck, fingers and toes. Many children outgrow it by late childhood but some may have it all their lives.

What are the risks?

It is not a dangerous condition but infection can occur from scratching.

What things appear to aggravate eczema?

Sand, dust, dummies, soaps, detergents, woollen clothes, scratching, dry skin, frequent washing with soap in winter, stress, certain foods, extremes of temperatures especially cold weather.

What about skin tests and injections?

The value of skin testing is doubtful and desensitisation injections can make it worse.

What is the treatment?

Self help

Avoid soap and perfumed products. Use a bland non-soap body wash. Apply moisturising agents that are bland. Have short showers. Avoid rubbing and scratching of affected skin. Avoid extreme changes of temperature. Wear soft cotton clothes. Use cotton blankets, avoid sand and dust.

Important point is that avoiding triggers will help manage the eczema. Keep the skin well moisturized.

Medical help

If the eczema is not improving with self help, antihistamines and special creams can help with the symptoms. You need to consult the healthcare professional to discuss the medical help further.

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