



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Helping babies and children with eczema

By: Tess Cox, PA-C, MEDDAC Pediatric Hospitalist

Eczema in babies and children is a form of dry skin that results when the skin loses moisture easily. The top layer of our skin, called the epidermis, is our first line of defense from our environment. An intact epidermis keeps irritants, allergens and germs from entering our body. In some children, there is a defect in the skin's barrier cells that allows extra water loss. It leads to severe irritation, dryness, and itching.

There used to be a belief that most eczema was caused by allergic reaction to food or environmental causes. Now we know that food and environmental allergens are the cause of only a small number of cases. The main issue is loss of moisture.

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, looks like dry, red patches of skin that can occur anywhere on the body in infants. Most young children are diagnosed by five years old and 60 percent will be diagnosed under one year of age.

As children get older, the skin condition can go away or localize to certain parts of the body, such as the inside of knees or elbows. Eczema can be a difficult skin condition to manage during childhood. For those who don't outgrow it, they must learn to care for their skin over a lifetime. Here in Colorado, the greatest enemy of our children's skin is the very dry climate. Skin needs a humidity of around 40 percent. Our humidity is normally around 15 to 20 percent.

What can we do to help our child's skin stay healthy or to treat mild eczema?

- Protect a child's skin from losing moisture. Use a cool mist humidifier in their room and make sure they drink plenty of water to keep the skin hydrated.
- High emollient creams are better than lotions. Lotions are water based, meaning the water can evaporate and even cause more drying! Stick with thick creams that come in a jar. These create a great barrier to lock in moisture. You may also use ointments such as petroleum jelly, non-scented shea butter or even a little olive oil mixed with creams. Use them liber-



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ally several times a day.

- Gentle or no soap! Soap is very drying. Let your child take a plain water, soaking bath every night. Use soap two to three times a week, applying it to soiled skin, groin areas and underarms. Be sure to rinse well. Avoid bubble baths as these are very drying to the skin and can cause urinary tract infections in girls. Pat, never rub the skin dry to avoid irritating the skin.
- Cotton pajamas greatly enhance the moisturizing power of creams and jellies. Dermatologists at Children's Hospital in Denver instruct parents to wet one pair of pajamas in warm water and wring it out and put it on baby, then cover with a dry set of footie pajamas and have baby sleep overnight in them. In the morning, the pajamas will be dry and the skin will be improved due to the increased moisture.
- If your child has a lot of itching and scratching, there are several ways to help control this. Use a tepid bath for five to ten minutes, followed by application of a high emollient cream. An oral anti-histamine such as Benadryl may be helpful. Apply a topical over-the-counter steroid cream applied two to three times a day.

If your child suffers from red, inflamed, dry, itching or scaly skin, see your primary care manager. If atopic dermatitis or eczema is diagnosed, it can be managed effectively most of the time but you must be persistent. There is no cure for eczema, only constant management, and a cause is rarely found. As always, consult your medical provider prior to giving/using any medications.