

# THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ATOPIC DERMATITIS (ECZEMA)

## What is atopic dermatitis (eczema)?

- A chronic skin disease that causes dry, irritated skin.
- The cause is unknown, but it is believed to run in families.
- Occurs most often in babies and children, but can appear at any age.
- Is not contagious.
- Allergens like dust mites, mold, pollen, or pet dander.
- Eating certain foods, such as fish, soy, wheat, milk, or peanuts.
- Skin infections.
- Long, hot baths or showers or anything else that dries the skin.

## What are the symptoms?

- An itchy rash, which appears most commonly on the face, hands and feet, behind the knees, and inside the elbows.
- Scratching may cause redness, swelling, scaling, and cracked, crusting, thick skin.
- Symptoms tend to come and go, worsening sometimes and improving or clearing up other times.
- People with atopic dermatitis (eczema) are more likely to have asthma and allergies, such as hay fever.

## What factors can worsen atopic dermatitis (eczema)?

- Irritants, like wool, soap, perfume, chlorine, or smoke.

## How is it treated?

- Practice a skin care routine to keep skin well-moisturized.
- Avoid things that lead to flares, such as allergens or irritants.
- Follow your doctor's advice for using skin creams or ointments to control swelling and reduce allergic reactions.
- Take antibiotics as directed for any infection related to the skin disorder.
- Antihistamines may reduce nighttime scratching.
- Light therapy, sometimes combined with a drug called psoralen, may reduce symptoms.
- Consult a specialist before getting the the smallpox vaccine because it can cause serious problems.

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## For More Information

[www.skincarephysicians.com/eczemanet/daily\\_care.html](http://www.skincarephysicians.com/eczemanet/daily_care.html)  
[www.skincarephysicians.com/eczemanet/moisturizing\\_cleansing.html](http://www.skincarephysicians.com/eczemanet/moisturizing_cleansing.html)  
Articles on skin care for people with eczema, from the American Academy of Dermatology.

[www.niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/Atopic\\_Dermatitis/default.asp](http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Atopic_Dermatitis/default.asp)  
Patient handout on atopic dermatitis from the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases.

[www.skincarephysicians.com/eczemanet/index.html](http://www.skincarephysicians.com/eczemanet/index.html)  
EczemaNet is a comprehensive online resource for patients and caregivers from the American Academy of Dermatology.

[www.nationaleczema.org/](http://www.nationaleczema.org/)  
The National Eczema Association provides sponsors support networks and education on eczema

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