

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. Here are a range of tips that may help you live well with eczema.

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, because you can see the colour of the blood under the skin. 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.
- Apply an ice pack or ice cubes covered with a damp cloth to the skin. This can help to reduce itching.
- Wear breathable clothing with natural fibres such as cotton. Synthetic fabrics can prevent heat and sweat from moving away from the body.
- 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. People with eczema can have many more germs on their skin than other people. An area the size of your fingernail can have as many as 100 million bacteria living on it! This is one reason you are more prone to developing skin infections. Try some of these tips to help reduce the risk:

- Keep fingernails short to limit damage from scratching and clean under nails.
- As soon as a scratch or skin split occurs, apply Medihoney Antibacterial Wound 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 wart virus). These infections can be more severe in people with eczema. If you think you have been infected, see your doctor.
- Wash hands before applying moisturisers.
- Keep skin thoroughly moisturised to prevent excessive dryness and cracking.
- For infants and children, use clothing specially designed to prevent skin damage from scratching. These usually have built in mittens or one piece outfits.



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.
- Use dust mite covers on pillow, mattress and bedding.
- 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.
- 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.
- Explore ways to reduce stress as this has a large impact on eczema.

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.

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, strengthens the immune system and feeds the skin from the inside.

- Omegas-3s are nourishing oils that, among other things, promote healthy skin and help to reduce inflammation. 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 in their diet.
- Reduce the amount of Omega-6s in the diet. They are found in processed foods. These fatty acids can contribute to inflammation in the body if we consume more Omega-6s than Omega-3s.
- Include plenty of antioxidant-rich foods in your diet such as brightly coloured fruit and vegetables. Antioxidants help to stabilise free radicals and prevent them from damaging our bodies. If necessary include antioxidant supplements, such as Olive Leaf Extract.
- 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 source of probiotics. If supplementing, there are many different strains of bacteria so check that the product you choose has strains that are clinically proven.



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