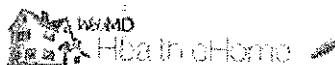




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Article Link: <http://www.webmd.com/allergies/guide/eczema>

## Allergies Guide

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### Eczema

Eczema is term for a group of medical conditions that cause the skin to become inflamed or irritated.

The most common type of eczema is known as atopic dermatitis, or atopic eczema. Atopic refers to a group of diseases with an often inherited tendency to develop other allergic conditions, such as asthma and hay fever.

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, the prevalence of atopic eczema is increasing and affects 9 to 30% of the U.S. population. It is particularly common in young children and infants. While many infants who develop the condition outgrow it by their second birthday, some people continue to experience symptoms on and off throughout life. With proper treatment, the disease can be controlled in the majority of sufferers.

#### What Are the Symptoms of Eczema?

No matter which part of the skin is affected, eczema is almost always itchy. Sometimes the itching will start before the rash appears, but when it does the rash most commonly occurs on the face, knees, hands, or feet. It may also affect other areas as well.

Affected areas usually appear very dry, thickened, or scaly. In fair-skinned people, these areas may initially appear reddish and then turn brown. Among darker-skinned people, eczema can affect pigmentation, making the affected area lighter or darker.

In infants, the itchy rash can produce an oozing, crusting condition that occurs mainly on the face and scalp, but patches may appear anywhere.

#### What Causes Eczema?

The exact cause of eczema is unknown, but it's thought to be linked to an overactive response by the body's immune system to unknown triggers.

In addition, eczema is commonly found in families with a history of other allergies or asthma.

Some people may suffer "flare-ups" of the itchy rash in response to certain substances or conditions. For some, coming into contact with rough or coarse materials may cause the skin to become itchy. For others, feeling too hot or too cold, exposure to certain household products like soap or detergent, or coming into contact with animal dander may cause an outbreak. Upper respiratory infections or colds may also be triggers. Stress may cause the condition to worsen.

Although there is no cure, most people can effectively manage their disease with medical treatment and by avoiding irritants. The condition is not contagious and can't be spread from person to person.

#### How Is Eczema Diagnosed?

Eczema can be diagnosed by a pediatrician, allergist, immunologist, dermatologist or your primary care provider. Since many people with eczema also suffer from allergies, your doctor may perform allergy tests to determine possible irritants or triggers. Children with eczema are especially likely to be tested for allergies.

#### What Is the Treatment for Eczema?

#### Pictures of Skin Problems



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The goal of treatment for eczema is to relieve and prevent itching, which can lead to infection. Since the disease makes skin dry and itchy, lotions and creams are recommended to keep the skin moist. These solutions are usually applied when the skin is damp, such as after bathing, to help the skin retain moisture. Cold compresses may also be used to relieve itching.

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