



Emirates Dermatology Society

ATOPIC DERMATITIS

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Eczema is a general term to describe skin that is inflamed (red, swollen, scaly and itchy). The term 'atopic' is used to describe a group of conditions, which include asthma, eczema and hay-fever and food allergy. These conditions are all linked by an increased activity of the allergy side of the body's immune system.

There is usually no need for a blood test or allergy tests to know if you have atopic dermatitis.

How common is atopic dermatitis?

Atopic dermatitis is a very common skin condition. It may start at any age, but the onset is often in childhood.

What causes atopic dermatitis?

Several factors appear important including

- ◆ Patient susceptibility and environmental factors.
- ◆ Patients typically have alterations in their skin barrier, and overly reactive inflammatory and allergy responses.
- ◆ Environmental factors include contact with soaps, detergents and any other chemicals applied to the skin, exposure to allergens, and infection with certain bacteria and viruses. —A tendency to atopic conditions often runs in families and is part of your genes. An alteration in a gene that is important in maintaining a healthy skin barrier has been closely linked to the development of eczema.

Is atopic dermatitis hereditary?

Yes. Atopic dermatitis tends to run in families. Approximately one third of children with AE will also develop asthma and/or hay fever.

What are the symptoms of Atopic Dermatitis?

The main symptom is itch. Scratching in response to itch may cause many of the changes seen on the skin. Itch can be severe enough to interfere with sleep, causing tiredness and irritability.



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What does atopic dermatitis look like?

Atopic dermatitis can affect any part of the skin, including the face, but the areas that are most commonly affected are the creases.

- ◆ Other common appearances include coin-sized areas of inflammation
- ◆ Affected skin is usually red and dry, and scratch marks
- ◆ When it is very active, it may become moist and weep fluid (during a 'flare-up') and small water blisters may develop especially on the hands and feet.
- ◆ In areas that are repeatedly scratched, the skin may thicken.

How is atopic dermatitis diagnosed?

The features of AD are usually easily recognized. Blood tests and skin tests are usually not necessary.

Can atopic dermatitis be cured?

No, it cannot be cured, but there are many ways of controlling it. As they get older, most children with atopic dermatitis will see their AE improve with 60% clear by their teens.

Can atopic dermatitis be prevented?

Regular use of medical moisturizers can help restore the skin's barrier in children who might otherwise develop AD.

For some patients who flare-up frequently, intermittent use of a topical steroid or calcineurin inhibitors (see below) may reduce the number of flare-ups.

What are the consequences of more severe atopic dermatitis?

- ◆ Sleep loss and fatigue
- ◆ Chronic stress, and even depression.
- ◆ Learning issues at school
- ◆ Impact on your occupational activities.

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Please refer to the below graphics for management of atopic dermatitis:

Self-care (What can I do?)



Moisturize your skin as often as possible, ideally at least 2-3 times each day. The most greasy, non-perfumed moisturizer tolerated is best.



Wash with a moisturizer instead of soap (known as a soap substitute), and avoid soap, bubble baths, shower gels and detergents.



Wear non-powdered non-rubber gloves (e.g.vinyl gloves) to protect your hands and avoid contact with irritants, such as when doing housework.



Rinse well after swimming and apply plenty of your moisturizer after drying. Make sure that the shower at the swimming pool contains fresh water and not chlorinated water from the swimming pool.



Wear comfortable clothes made of materials such as cotton and avoid wearing wool next to your skin.



Try to resist the temptation to scratch. It may relieve your itch briefly, but it will make your skin itchier in the long term. Smooth a moisturizer onto itchy skin.



Keep cool.
Overheating can make eczema itch more.



Treat eczema early - the more severe it becomes, the more difficult it is to control.

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How can atopic dermatitis be treated?



While every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this leaflet is accurate, not every treatment will be suitable or effective for every person. Your own clinician will be able to advise in greater detail.