

### What is atopic dermatitis?

Atopic dermatitis, sometimes called **atopic eczema**, is a condition that makes the skin dry, red and itchy. It may last for months or even years, which is why doctors describe it as a **chronic** condition. Atopic dermatitis is more common in children, but adults can get it too. The good news is that many children see their skin improve as they get older.

While atopic dermatitis **cannot** be “caught” from someone else, and cannot be passed on to others, it can run in families, and people with this skin condition may also have other health problems related to **allergies**, such as asthma (breathing difficulties), allergic rhinitis (sneezing and stuffy nose triggered by allergens), or certain food allergies.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone experiences atopic dermatitis differently. Some people have mild symptoms while others have more serious ones. Common symptoms include:

- Red, inflamed skin
- Itching
- Dry, flaky skin
- Small raised bumps



It is important to see a doctor promptly if you notice signs of a possible skin **infection**. These may include leaking or oozing fluid, yellow crusty patches, increasing swelling or pain in the affected areas, or developing a fever.

Although atopic dermatitis does not have a permanent cure, many people live comfortably with it, using treatments that control symptoms and keep the skin healthy.<sup>2,3</sup>

### Why does my atopic dermatitis worsen sometimes and what triggers it?

If you have atopic dermatitis, you may notice that your symptoms come and go. There will be times when your skin is calm and other times when symptoms suddenly get worse (**flares**). Many everyday factors can trigger a flare, such as:<sup>3</sup>



Sudden changes in temperature, such as hot weather



Cigarette smoke



Emotional upsets or stress



Skin flakes from pets (dander)



Frequent bathing, especially with soaps or hot water



Dust mites

### How should I manage my daily activities?

#### Showering:<sup>2,4</sup>

Take short showers, about 10 minutes or less, once or twice each day using cool to lukewarm water, as hot water can dry out and irritate the skin. Choose gentle, fragrance-free cleansers to avoid irritation.

After showering, pat your skin dry with a towel instead of rubbing, and apply moisturiser **within five minutes** whilst your skin is still slightly damp to lock moisture in.



#### Swimming:<sup>5</sup>

Keep swims **short** (under one hour) and avoid swimming during flares or when your skin is broken, as this increases irritation and infection risk.

Apply **sunscreen** at least 15 minutes before swimming, wear **UV-protective swimwear**, and avoid strong sun, which can trigger flares. After swimming, rinse off pool chemicals straight away, and **apply moisturiser** whilst your skin is still damp.



## Do I need to avoid any food?

Many people think that avoiding certain foods will prevent flares, but this is usually not the case. Food allergy testing is often unnecessary as food allergies rarely cause or worsen eczema. The test results may also be inaccurate and will require specialist interpretation by a dermatologist or allergist.

However, if you notice that a particular food makes your skin worse, write down what you ate and take photos of any rashes so you can discuss them with your **doctor**. Do not cut out many different foods from your diet as this can lead to **poor nutrition** and make it harder for your skin and body to stay healthy.

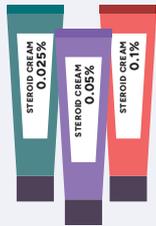
## What moisturiser should I choose and how do I use it?<sup>2</sup>

Choose an affordable moisturiser that you will use regularly and that works for you. **Avoid** products with fragrances or colourings as these can trigger flares. Lotions, creams and ointments can all help – ointments are stickier than creams or lotions but work better for severe cases.

Apply moisturiser **generously** to the affected areas, or your whole body, **at least twice daily**, and more often during flares. For best results, apply **within five minutes** after showering to help your skin retain moisture better. You can also reapply whenever your skin feels dry or itchy throughout the day. Scan the QR code to learn more about moisturisers and how to use them.<sup>6</sup>



## Why do I need topical steroids and what do they do?<sup>7</sup>



Topical steroids, one of the common treatments for atopic dermatitis, are applied directly to the skin to **relieve itch** and **reduce inflammation**. The amount of time you need to use them will depend on how **severe** your symptoms are. Your healthcare provider will advise you on the correct strength, amount and how long to use it. Always follow their instructions and go back for a review if your skin is not improving.

Delayed or inadequate treatment worsens your symptoms and increases the risk of skin infections due to increased scratching from the itch. You may also need stronger steroids eventually for a longer period.

## Are topical steroids safe for me?

Topical steroids are generally **safe** when you use them the way your doctor tells you to. The key is using the **right strength** in the **right amount** for the **recommended length of time**.

- **Very little** enters the bloodstream when used according to instructions. Most of the medicine stays on the skin where you apply it and will not affect growth and development.<sup>8</sup>
- **They do not cause dependence** when used according to your doctor's instruction. Your body will not crave them or need more for them to work.

The risks of side effects like skin thinning, stretch marks (reddish, purple or white lines on your skin), or acne in the areas where the cream was applied are unlikely when used according to your doctor's instructions.<sup>7</sup> Discuss any concerns about your treatment with your doctor, who can advise options that are suitable for you.



## Can I try alternative treatments for my atopic dermatitis?

It is important to discuss with your doctor before trying any alternative therapies, as there may not be strong evidence of the benefits of such treatments. Some may also cause side effects, interfere with your medications, or even make your symptoms worse.



### Sources

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