

# Eczema

## What is eczema?

Eczema (ECK-zuh-muh) is a common skin condition that affects children and adults. It is sometimes called atopic dermatitis (DER-muh-TIE-tiss). Eczema causes skin problems, such as dryness, redness, crusting, cracking, blistering, oozing, or thickening of the skin. These symptoms may come and go, or they may be there all the time.

## How do I know if I have it?

You may have eczema if you have recurrent itching on your skin and three or more of the following:

- A history of rash on certain parts of your body, such as wrists, ankles, shins, forearms, neck, and behind the knees
- Red, dry, and scaly skin over these same parts of your body
- Persistent dry skin
- Red, dry, and scaly skin that appears before two years of age
- A history of asthma or hay fever

## How is it treated?

See your doctor if you have these symptoms. Eczema usually is treated with ointments and creams, most commonly steroids. Steroids are an inexpensive and effective treatment.

Side effects may include thinning of the skin. This can happen especially on areas of the body where the skin is naturally thinner. However, this usually does not happen unless strong steroids are used for a long time. Other medicines used to treat eczema are called calcineurin inhibitors. They do not cause skin thinning, but they are more expensive than steroids. If your eczema is severe, your doctor will help you find other treatment options.

## What else can I do to help my eczema?

Don't scratch the areas of your skin that have eczema. Scratching can make symptoms worse. Use plenty of lotion every day. Take showers with warm or cool, but not hot, water. Use only mild, non-drying soaps.

## Where can I get more information?

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

Web site: <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/eczema-and-atopic-dermatitis.html>

International Eczema-Psoriasis Foundation

Web site: <http://www.internationaleczema-psoriasisfoundation.org>

National Eczema Association

Web site: <http://www.nationaleczema.org>

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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