



The Children's Doctor

All you need to know about ...

Eczema



What is eczema?

Eczema is a condition causing dry, itchy areas on the skin. It is also known as dermatitis. It is not contagious. It frequently occurs in families and is strongly linked with asthma and hay fever.

The cause is usually not known although it may sometimes be associated with allergies to dust mite, wool, pets or occasionally food.

It can affect any area of the body but usually affects the face in babies, inside of wrists in toddlers, and folds of elbows and knees in older children.

How can I prevent a flare up of eczema?

The following are known to irritate sensitive skin and should be avoided:

- * wool
- * acrylic
- * dust mite
- * soap (sorbolene can be used as a soap alternative)
- * bubble bath
- * sand
- * chlorine
- * pet hair

How should I treat eczema if it flares up?

Sorbolene cream with 10% glycerine is the mainstay of eczema therapy. It should be applied liberally over the entire body at least twice every day. It will help to reduce dryness. It is cheap and readily available from pharmacies and supermarkets. If sorbolene cream stings or is not tolerated, Eucerin ointment is also very effective.

When eczema flares up, steroid creams should be used to settle the inflammation. These creams are safe when used as directed but should only be applied to affected areas (not the whole body). When the eczema settles, the steroid should be stopped. Treatment with moisturising creams (sorbolene) should continue.

Occasionally, eczema will become infected with a bacteria requiring treatment with an oral antibiotic.

If the skin continues to deteriorate despite treatment at home, hospitalisation may be required for the application of wet dressings.

Always seek medical advice if the condition continues to deteriorate despite usual therapy.