

Atopic Dermatitis (Eczema) Treatment

Michael T. Mosher, MD

*Diplomate of the American Board of
Allergy and Immunology*

415 E. Rolling Oaks Dr. #280, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360
2876 Sycamore Dr. #301, Simi Valley, CA 93065
(805) 496-8522

I. Reduce itching and scratching

- A. Avoid local irritants (e.g., wool garments); soft cotton fabrics preferred. Wash clothing and bed sheets in a mild detergent. Liquid detergents are preferred, such as TIDE™ Free Liquid or All™ Free and Clear Liquid Detergent. Rinse well - consider extra rinse cycle. Avoid starch and fabric softeners.
- B. Keep fingernails short; use mittens or socks on hands of small children.
- C. Keep affected areas covered (long sleeve shirts)
- D. Keep ambient temperature if possible (68-72 degrees)
- E. Avoid aggravating factors such as animals, dust, sprays, perfumes, allergenic foods for some.
- F. Oral antihistamines may help skin itching

II. Keep skin moisturized

- A. Tub bath for severe flaring or for very dry skin - for 20 minutes (until fingertips wrinkle). Use lukewarm water only. Use mild neutral soaps (Olay, Dove). Avoid deodorant and perfumed soaps. Wet compresses if bathing is painful or for nighttime itch control. Shower acceptable when skin is under good control or when flare is mild.
- B. Avoid washcloths, rubbing, scrubbing, or overuse of soap
- C. After bathing, dry off only partially by patting with a towel - do not rub. While some water is still on the skin, within 3 minutes and before leaving the bathroom: Apply medicated steroid vs. non-steroid cream/ointment to red, itchy areas, apply moisturizer to other areas.
- D. Moisturizing should be repeated as often as necessary to keep skin soft throughout the day. Recommended moisturizers include:
Eucerin or Aquaphor creams (in jar) – not lotions in pump bottle.

III. Treat and prevent inflammation

- A. Topical steroids and, more recently, non-steroid medications such as Elidel or Protopic are currently the most effective anti-inflammatory medications.
- B. A common myth about these anti-inflammatory medications is that they will stop the itching almost immediately after they are applied. They do not work this way. They gradually decrease the inflammation in the skin over several days. After the inflammation is under control, the itching will subside.
- C. It is very important to use these medications on a regular basis, twice daily initially, then tapered as directed. They do not work well when used on an “as needed” basis. If stopped, completely, the rash will come back.

IV. Treat possible infection

- A. Warm, red, crusting areas may indicate superinfection with *Staphylococcus aureus*. A short course of antibiotics may be required.

Sample topical steroid treatment plan: Apply to affected areas:

Twice/day x 5 days

Once/day x 5 days

Every other day x 10 days

Twice/week (Tuesdays and Fridays for example) maintenance for several months.