



# Eczema and Dry Skin

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Eczema

Eczema (or “atopic dermatitis”) is a chronic skin disorder. It often affects people with asthma, hay fever, and other allergies. It causes a very itchy, red, scaly rash that may weep or ooze a clear fluid. The rash may:

- Develop as red bumps or blisters that break and crust over.
- Become infected, especially if scratching is a problem.

In children, eczema appears most often on the face, scalp, buttocks, thighs, and torso. It’s often worse during infancy, and generally improves by ages 5 or 6, or by early adulthood.

In adults, eczema usually affects the neck, inside of the elbows, and backs of the knees. Adults whose hands or feet are often exposed to irritating substances, such as chemicals, can develop eczema on those areas.

### Home treatment

There are many steps you can take to help improve eczema. The most important is preventing dry skin. (See back for more information.) Avoiding harsh chemicals and allergens are also important.

Here’s how to help your skin retain moisture and recover from eczema:

- Take daily baths or showers with lukewarm (not hot) water. Use a gentle soap (Dove, Basis, Aveeno, Neutrogena) or a non-soap cleanser (Cetaphil or Aveeno).
- After bathing, pat skin dry with a towel. Don’t rub.
- Apply a lubricating cream (Vaseline, Nutraderm, DML, Moisturel). The cream may help keep your skin from drying out. Reapply often.
- Use an oral antihistamine (Benadryl) to help relieve itching

and relax you enough to allow sleep if needed. Avoid topical antihistamine and antiseptic creams and sprays, which irritate the skin.

- Use a humidifier in the bedroom.
- Avoid contact with any irritants or allergens (chemicals, strong perfumes, or certain fabrics such as wool and acrylics). Wear gloves when doing dishes.
- Wash clothes and bedding in a mild, fragrance free detergent, and rinse at least twice. Don’t use a fabric softener if it is irritating.

### Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- Crusting or weeping sores appear. You may have a bacterial infection.
- A red, patchy rash appears on your face and you have joint pain and fever.
- Itching interferes with sleep and home treatment is not working.

### Relief from itching for dry skin and eczema

- Keep the itchy area cool and wet. Try a compress soaked in ice water.
- Take an oatmeal bath to help relieve itching. Wrap one cup of oatmeal in a cotton cloth and boil as you would to cook it. Use this as a sponge and bathe in tepid water without soap. Or try an Aveeno colloidal oatmeal bath.
- Use calamine lotion for poison ivy or oak rashes.
- Try an over-the-counter 1-percent hydrocortisone cream or ointment for small itchy areas. Use very sparingly on your face or genitals. If itching is severe, your physician may prescribe a stronger cream.
- Try an over-the-counter oral antihistamine (such as Chlor-Trimeton or Benadryl).
- Cut nails short or wear gloves at night to prevent scratching.
- Wear cotton clothing. Avoid wool and acrylic fabrics next to your skin.



# Eczema and Dry Skin

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### Dry skin

Dry, itchy, flaky skin is a common problem. When the skin loses water (not oil) to the air, you can develop excessive dryness. This can be caused by:

- Dry indoor air.
- Excessive bathing with strong soaps and hot water.
- Lower humidity and indoor heat in winter.

### Steps to prevent dry skin

- Humidify your home, especially the bedroom.
- Avoid hot showers and baths. They strip the skin of the natural oils that help hold in moisture.
- Don't use strong deodorant soaps or soaps containing lye (such as Ivory), which can be very harsh or drying. Use mild soaps such as Dove or Aveeno moisturizing bar, or use nonsoap cleansers such as Cetaphil.
- Limit use of perfumes and perfumed products.
- Avoid overexposure to the sun.

### Home treatment for dry skin

- Follow the prevention guidelines above.
- Bathe daily. Use warm or cool water and a gentle soap (Dove, Tone, or Basis).
- Pat dry with a towel. Don't rub your skin.
- Apply a moisturizing cream (Vaseline, Moisturel, Nutraderm) while the skin is still damp to seal in moisture. A light layer of petroleum jelly is also an effective and inexpensive moisturizer. Reapply cream often.
- Soak hands in lukewarm water for 5 minutes and then apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly and wear thin cotton gloves to bed. This works well for very dry hands. You can also do this to help dry feet, wearing a pair of cotton socks overnight.
- Avoid scratching, which damages the skin.

### Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- You itch all over your body without an obvious cause or rash.
- Itching is so bad that you cannot sleep and home treatment methods don't help.
- The skin is badly broken due to scratching.

### Additional resources

For more health information tools, and other resources:

- Search [kp.org/mydoctor](https://kp.org/mydoctor)
- Contact your local Health Education Department

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.

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