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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Prevention is best medicine for itchy skin condition

Cases of an itchy skin condition called atopic dermatitis or eczema are on the rise, but there are many things parents can do to help combat the itch.

About one in 10 U.S. children will suffer from eczema at some point. A family history of asthma or hay fever might be an early sign that a child will develop eczema.

Patches of dry, red, itchy skin are among symptoms. Irritated areas arise in different places depending on the child's age. In infants, eczema usually appears on the cheeks, scalp, torso, arms and legs. Young children often develop it on their joints and in skin folds. On older children and teens, symptoms appear on the hands and feet. Eczema is not contagious, and many children outgrow the condition.

Doctors are starting to uncover the causes of this itchy problem. Skin keeps water in the body and irritants out. One of the barriers in skin is a protein called filaggrin. Researchers found that many people who suffer from atopic dermatitis have filaggrin protein that lets water leave the skin and irritants enter. The faulty filaggrin also may make it easier for bacteria to grow. These factors combined lead to skin problems.

Many things can set off skin flare-ups or worsening of symptoms, including pollen, mold, dust, coarse fabrics, heat, harsh skin products and detergents, and stress. Scratching makes the skin more inflamed.

If your child is diagnosed with eczema, your pediatrician may suggest baths with mild soap, extra moisturizers for skin, medicine applied to the skin or medicine taken by mouth.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following to prevent flare-ups:

- Keep your child's skin moisturized with fragrance-free cream or ointment.
- Have your child take short baths with room temperature water.
- Use mild laundry detergent with no dyes or perfumes.
- Keep your child's finger nails short and smooth, and remind her not to scratch.
- Be on the lookout for what sets off a skin problem.
- Try to have your child avoid stressful situations or getting overheated.



— Mary McGrath

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