

A Treatment Plan for Children with Eczema

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Here is a treatment plan for your child with eczema.

Different products may be used on different parts of the body, depending on whether the skin is dry, inflamed (red, bumpy, itchy), or oozing (early infection).

For dry skin that is not inflamed:

Apply your moisturizer (Vaseline, Aquaphor, Eucerin, or other brands) always after bathing and whenever the skin feels itchy or dry. Once your child starts to itch and scratch, the skin will get worse. **Reapply** your moisturizer frequently.

For rough, red, inflamed skin or when moisturizer is not helping:

Start using your medicated ointments or creams. Ointments are usually more effective than creams.

Use the lowest-strength product needed to control the roughness, redness, and itchiness, especially on parts of the body where skin is thinner (such as around the eyes and mouth, on the face in general, and in the armpits, groin, and diaper region).

Use the medicated ointments instead of the moisturizer for the affected skin. You can still use the moisturizer for the other parts of the body that are just dry but not inflamed.

Like the moisturizer, **always** apply the medicated ointment after bathing and **at least** two to three times a day.

When the skin starts getting better, reduce the strength of the medicine or return to your moisturizer for protection until the skin stays smooth for at least a month.

Medicated Ointments: Weakest to Strongest

Medication	Availability	Comments
Hydrocortisone 0.5%, 1%	Over the counter	Weaker
Hydrocortisone 2.5%	By prescription	Safe for the face; use caution near eyes and mouth
Triamcinolone 0.025%, 0.1%	By prescription	Stronger: Not for the face, underarm, groin, or diaper area unless instructed by your doctor

As the skin improves, reduce the strength of the medication or return to your moisturizer. Many children will need a different strength for different parts of the body. Other pharmacies may carry different medications. Consult with your physician if you are using a product other than those discussed here.

To prevent eczema-prone skin:

Skin prone to eczema is usually in areas like the hands, the ankles, the neck, and the skin creases at the elbow and knee. For some children, certain parts of the body always tend to get rough, red, and inflamed despite the use of moisturizer. Your doctor may have you apply either Elidel cream or Protopic ointment (0.03 percent or 0.1 percent) twice a day to protect these sensitive areas.

Neither Elidel nor Protopic have steroids and therefore are much safer than hydrocortisone and triamcinolone for daily use. However, if the skin gets worse while using

Elidel or Protopic, you may need to switch back to the steroid medications to bring the skin under control before returning to Elidel/Protopic for preventive purposes.

For oozing rashes:

If you are using the medicated skin products (hydrocortisone, triamcinolone, Elidel, or Protopic) and the skin is not improving or begins to ooze liquid, the skin may be getting infected. If your child has a tendency to have infected areas, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic ointment or cream called Mupirocin (Bactroban) to be used three times a day whenever the skin looks like it may be getting infected. Polysporin or Bacitracin are over-the-counter antibiotic ointments that can also be tried.

If you use an antibiotic ointment, you should **stop** using any other medicated ointments on that area until the rash is drying up. If the antibiotic ointment or cream has not been effective within three or four days, your child may need to take an antibiotic by mouth to control the infection. Common antibiotics used by mouth are cephalexin (Keflex), dicloxacillin, and erythromycin.

Using oral medications to control itchiness:

Controlling itching and scratching is very important when your child has dry skin or inflamed skin. Once a child starts to scratch, the skin will be more easily broken and will become even more itchy. As the skin continues to be irritated, it will be more easily infected.

If your child's rash is worse in the morning, he or she is likely scratching the skin while asleep. Along with using your medicated ointment, it's important to have your child take an antihistamine for itchiness. In the beginning, antihistamines may make your child drowsy or sleepy. The dosage can be adjusted up or down depending on how sleepy your child gets.

Diphenhydramine (Benadryl, over the counter) and hydroxyzine (Atarax, by prescription) are the two most common products. Often your child will get use to one of the medicines, and you will need to give a little bit more to control the itchiness. Sometimes patients need to switch from one to the other when the first is no longer working and then switch back later when the second one stops working. Consult your doctor for the proper dose of any medication. These medications can be given every four to six hours as needed.

Using sunscreen to prevent sun damage and irritation:

Always apply sunscreen before going outside, even on cloudy days. The damaging ultraviolet rays can penetrate the clouds and irritate the skin. The face is very sensitive to the sun and wind and, when inflamed, may start to change color (getting white spots from skin irritation). Using sunscreen regularly for several months will allow the new skin to come in with a more even color. Look for hypoallergenic products with an SPF of at least 15 or higher. SPF 30 is usually high enough. Reapply sunscreen frequently, especially when the skin feels dry. Before using any skin product on your face, test it on your arm or leg. Everybody's skin is different.

Knowing when to call your doctor:

Here are some indications that you should call your doctor for advice or evaluation:

- When the rash becomes raw and bleeding despite using your antibiotic ointment
- If the rash is painful and oozing (this may be a herpes rash that the medications discussed here will not help and might make worse)
- When the itchiness can not be controlled

- If you have any suspicions about allergies
- If you are not sure which product to use