

# Childhood eczema:

a parent and carer's guide



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## Caring for a child with eczema

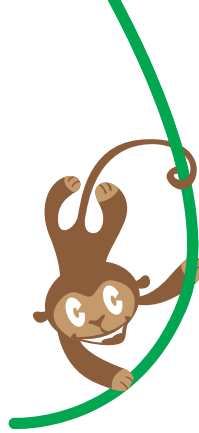
Caring for a child (or children) with eczema can be challenging and worrying. If your child has been recently diagnosed with eczema, dealing with it will still be new to you and you may be looking for more information and support. If you're the parent or carer of a child with long-standing eczema, you may already be in the swing of managing your child's skin condition.

Nevertheless, this leaflet offers information, practical tips and valuable support that will help you:

- Find out more about eczema
- Learn how treatment works and why establishing a daily emollient routine is so important
- Discover practical strategies to enable your child to take control of their eczema and live life to the full
- Find out what to expect from your healthcare team – in line with the latest guidance from the NHS

We've also developed a website that is dedicated to supporting people with eczema – it's called **EczemaZones.co.uk**. More in-depth information and support for parents and carers can be found in the 'Happy Days' zone, and there is lots of interactive fun in our children's zones. Visit **www.EczemaZones.co.uk** to find out more.

You might also want to contact the National Eczema Society – **www.eczema.org** – who can provide valuable support, as well as information about local events and activities.



## The truth about eczema

Eczema is an itchy, red rash that can be dry and cracked or weepy and crusty. It typically comes and goes, in a cycle of flare-ups and periods of remission. However, for some children the amount of time between flare-ups can be very short, so they feel their eczema is always there.



### What causes eczema?

Healthy skin forms a natural protective barrier that keeps water inside the body, and dirt, irritants and bacteria out.

Skin with eczema does not provide the same protection, which means the skin dries out, becoming itchy, sore and cracked, making it more likely to become infected.

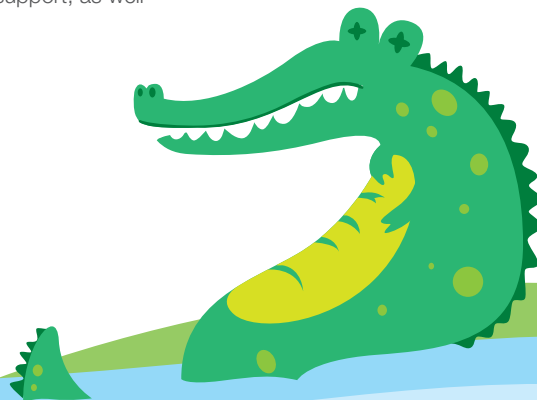
### Why has my child got eczema?

Atopic (allergic) eczema is a condition that affects as many as 1 in 5 children in the UK. It often runs in families, which means your child is more likely to get it if either parent has a problem with dry skin or had eczema in the past.

### Will my child's eczema get better or go away?

Eczema is a chronic, fluctuating condition, which means that your child is likely to have bouts of eczema for many years – although three quarters of children outgrow eczema by the time they are in their teens. The good news is that getting the right treatment and sticking to a daily emollient routine will help to reduce how often and how bad your child's flare-ups are.

You can find out more about eczema on the **EczemaZones** website, including advice about how to explain to your child what eczema is.



## Avoiding your child's triggers

Avoiding things that trigger your child's eczema is the best way to prevent flare-ups, but we know that this is not always possible. That's why we've given you some practical ways to avoid some of the most common triggers below – you can find many more tips on [EczemaZones.co.uk](http://EczemaZones.co.uk).

### House dust mites

These microscopic creatures like warm, damp places such as mattresses and soft furnishings, and live off skin cells that we shed. While you can't get rid of them completely, vacuuming and dusting the house once a week, and fitting barrier covers to mattresses, pillows and duvets can all help.

### Your family pet(s)

Pets make us happy, so we're not suggesting for one minute that you get rid of yours, if you have one. But furry animals like cats and dogs can be a problem for some children. So reducing the amount of time that your child spends with their pet and the type of contact they have with them can help. Visit [EczemaZones.co.uk](http://EczemaZones.co.uk) to find out more.

### Heat

When your child's skin gets warm it can become itchy and uncomfortable and cause your child to scratch. This scratching leads to more itching, and is known as the itch-scratch cycle. Children often overheat while they are asleep, so keeping them cool at night time can make a big difference. You could try buying them cotton nightclothes, replacing thick duvets with lighter sheets and turning down the central heating.

### Soaps and bubble baths

Soaps, shower gels, bubble baths and everyday wash products often contain ingredients like lanolin, parabens and sodium lauryl sulphate that can aggravate sore skin. So it's best to avoid these products altogether – you can find out more about replacement emollient wash products later in this leaflet. Some emollients also contain these ingredients, so it's worth trying one that is low in sensitisers, such as Dipbase, which is available over the counter.

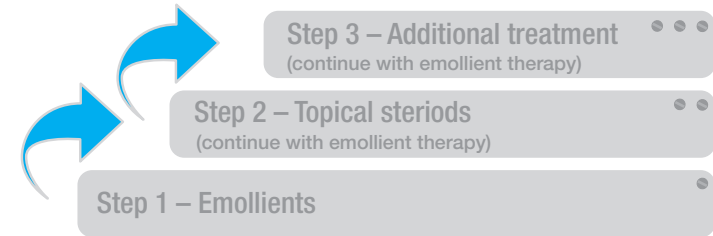
#### Support from your healthcare team

Your child's doctor or nurse should talk to you about triggers and help you to identify any factors that might be affecting your child's eczema. For some children, certain foods like dairy products, nuts and wheat can be a problem. If you think food might be a problem for your child, talk to your child's doctor or nurse.



## Managing your child's eczema

Every time your child sees their doctor or nurse, they will assess your child's skin to decide whether their eczema is clear, mild, moderate or severe. The treatment your child receives will depend on this assessment and will be managed in a stepwise way:

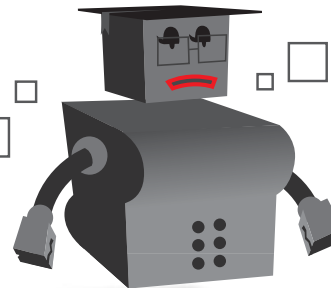


Understanding how your child's treatment works is an important part of coping with eczema. It will help you to know when and how to use different treatments (emollients all the time and topical steroids during flare-ups), and help you to recognise flare-ups so you can have the confidence to 'step up' and 'step down' your child's treatment yourself. It will also help you and your child to see when treatment is working and encourage them to accept treatment more willingly.

Emollients are a very important part of your child's treatment plan because they soothe, heal and protect sore skin by replacing lost moisture and restoring the skin's natural protective barrier. You can find out lots more about emollients and how to use them on the next page.

#### Support from your healthcare team

Your child's doctor or nurse will spend time with you and your child (if appropriate) explaining what each treatment is for. They should also give you a demonstration on how to apply each one and written information you can take away with you.



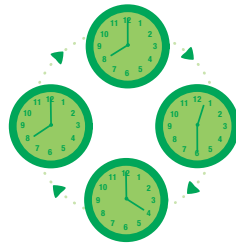
# Getting to grips with your child's emollient

## How often does it need to be applied?

The reality is that many people just don't use their emollient enough for it to do its job properly, and for them to see the best results. You'll need to put it on every day (in-between and during flare-ups, even when your child's skin is clear) and apply it every 3-4 hours.

Applying an emollient can be time consuming – and your child may not enjoy doing it! However, trying to build emollient application into their daily routine can help to make it a regular habit. Why not apply the emollient at set times in the day such as:

- Before they get dressed in the morning
- Just after lunch (although you may need to make special arrangements with your child's nursery or school)
- When they get home from nursery or school
- After their night-time bath or after they have cleaned their teeth



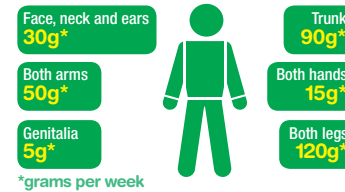
We've created some handy charts that your child can use to record how often they are putting on their emollient – your child can print them out or use them online. Visit [www.EczemaZones.co.uk](http://www.EczemaZones.co.uk) and choose the right 'zone' for your child:

- Eczema Jungle – jungle fun for the under 5s
- Eczema Robots – a blast for the under 12s



## How much should we be putting on?

Be generous – generally speaking you'll need far more emollient than you might imagine. Your child should use a large amount of emollient – at least 250g a week. So you should expect to use between 2 and 4 pump dispensers (500g each) every month. This chart will help you to see how much your child will need on different parts of their body.



## What type of emollient does my child need?

Emollients come in a range of different forms including ointments, creams, lotions and gels. All emollients moisturise the skin, although you may prefer some to others. What's really important is that your child uses them enough.

Emollients can be also used in different ways to help you avoid everyday wash products: this is called 'complete emollient therapy'.



For moisturising – ointments, creams, lotions or gels



As a soap substitute – creams



For use in the bath or shower – emollient bath and/or shower additives

To find out more about emollients visit [EczemaZones.co.uk](http://EczemaZones.co.uk) – you and your child could read one of our interactive storybooks together.

## Support from your healthcare team

Your doctor or nurse should give your child a selection of unperfumed emollients to try so that they can choose the one they want to use. They should also discuss your child's bathing and skincare routines and suggest wash products that your child can use to help them avoid cosmetic ones.





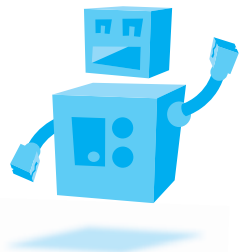
# Supporting your child



Looking after a child with a chronic condition like eczema is extremely demanding and can be distressing for you, your child and your family as a whole. But rest assured, there are things you can do to support your child:

- **Encourage your child to keep a diary** – It's good for children with eczema to talk about how they feel. On [EczemaZones.co.uk](http://EczemaZones.co.uk) we've created special feelings charts so your child can record how they and their skin are feeling.
- **Make treatment fun for younger children** – Forcing your child to accept treatment can make them irritable, angry and upset. You could try to make treatment fun by making faces or drawing shapes with their emollient on their skin.
- **Try to balance support and understanding with tough love** – Some children use their eczema to get attention or to get their own way. Be strong and don't make special allowances for bad behaviour.
- **Talk to the school about your child's eczema** – While you probably won't want to single your child out, talking to their school might allow you to make some special arrangements that help your child avoid the things that make their eczema worse, such as sitting on a dusty carpet at story time or sitting next to a radiator. The school may also be more understanding if sleepless nights are affecting your child's performance in the classroom.
- **Talk to your child about their school day** – School-age children with eczema can feel different and isolated, so it's important your child has a grown-up to turn to when they need to talk, whether that's you or perhaps a grandparent.
- **Try to carry on as normal** – Living with eczema does not mean your child has to miss out. Of course there may be times when they don't feel like joining in, but on the whole children with eczema can do all the things other children do. So don't let it hold them back.
- **Take steps to reduce night-time itching** – Night-time itching can make it difficult for children with eczema to get to sleep and to stay asleep. If your child is struggling to sleep, it may well be affecting their mood, their concentration and how they cope with everyday life; you may be suffering too! Visit [EczemaZones.co.uk](http://EczemaZones.co.uk) for practical hints and tips.

Managing your child's eczema is about so much more than treatments, however, sticking to your treatment plan will help to make your child's eczema better, which will make living with eczema that bit easier.



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