

What is Atopic eczema?

Atopic eczema is a common type of skin inflammation. It is caused by an inherited allergic reaction towards the potential allergens. It is not infectious, that means the rash would not be transmitted through personal contact. Other atopy conditions like hay fever, asthma or urticaria may also be presented in affected individual or their family members.

What are the symptoms of atopic eczema?

The main symptoms of atopic eczema are intensive skin itching and inflammation. The skin of the affected individual usually feels dry. Some areas of the skin become red and inflamed. The most common areas affected are next to skin creases such as the front of the elbows and wrists, backs of knees, and around the neck. Both babies and adults may be affected.

What can cause flare-up of the symptoms?

Atopic eczema can be made worse by contact with allergens or irritants, including change in weather (e.g. temperature or humidity changes), chemical irritant (e.g. fragrance, cleansing agent), household environment (e.g. dust mite, animal fur, carpet), emotional state (e.g. anxiety) etc.

How can I prevent eczema?

Although there is no complete cure of atopic eczema, it can always be controlled and prevented. The affected individual should avoid contact with allergens or irritants as much as possible. Below are some preventive measures that can be undertaken:

Environmental aspect

- Avoid extremes of temperature and humidity, e.g. keep the bedroom cool at night by air-conditioner. Climatic factors can have a substantial effect on eczema. For example, sweating resulted from hot weather in summer or after vigorous exercise can aggravate skin itching. Also, dryness of the skin is more prominent in winter, which requires frequent application of hypoallergic moisturizer e.g. aqueous cream or emulsifying ointment.
- Maintain a good household hygiene. Clean the floor and furniture with wet cleansing cloth to minimize the dusty environment at home.

Personal habit

- Avoid over-bathing, and minimize the use of soap, detergent and hot water, which can cause dryness of skin. Apply moisturizer after bathing or shower.
- Avoid rough clothing e.g. wool and some synthetic fibres. Fine cotton clothing is usually well-tolerated.
- Avoid scratching so as to reduce the skin damage and infection.
- Maintain a pleasant mind.
- Clinical research didn't show a strong correlation between particular food and flare-up of eczema. But it is best to avoid such food if affected individual found the eczema is made worse after intake.

What is the treatment for atopic eczema?

Doctor should be consulted if the symptom is not controlled with preventive measures. Commonly used medication includes topical corticosteroids (e.g. Hydrocortisone), topical immuno-modulators (e.g. Elidel) and oral antihistamines. Occasionally, the doctor may prescribe a systemic corticosteroid if the symptoms appeared to be more severe.

It is very important to follow the instruction given by doctor when using the medication, especially for topical steroids, as the strength of medication is adjusted according to the patient's age, severity and location of the skin. Like other medication, topical steroids are safe and effective when being used correctly. Improper use may lead to side effect. Moreover, patient should always avoid using medication from other people or obtaining it over-the-counter, so as to minimize the occurrence of side effect.

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