

Eczema & Dermatitis

What is Eczema?

This is a rash that's caused by small fluid-filled blisters under the skin. They move to the surface and break when people scratch them. They can be very itchy. They can also get infected. Common on the hands, fingers, face, elbows, backs of knees but can occur elsewhere too. Please get this correctly diagnosed by a doctor. Lots of rashes are not eczema.

What is Dermatitis?

Dermatitis is very similar to eczema but is caused by something external that the person is touching. An allergy to the metal nickel is a common example of contact dermatitis.

What can cause or aggravate eczema?

Internal factors

- **Atopy:** genetically inherited allergy. Usually asthma and hay fever in family members too.
- **Diet:** common triggers or aggravating foods are wheat, dairy, soya, eggs, nuts and other proteins.
- Deficiency of good fats in diet i.e. omega oils
- Poor digestion and/or leaky gut syndrome. Especially common if having had numerous courses of antibiotics.
- Stress, anxiety & worry. More likely in older children, especially if circumstances at school, socially or in home life are very unpleasant.
- **BABIES:** if born with eczema, always seek help from a professional medical practitioner, rather than DIY. If developing later, this can often happen at stage of introducing new foods or drinks. Monitor this and try to see if there is any link. If cow's milk is an issue then goat or soya based formula milk might help.

External factors/Environmental triggers

- Chlorine in water. Home water supply. Swimming pool.
- Nickel allergy (common cause of contact dermatitis).
- Chemicals e.g. biological laundry liquid or powder, cleaning fluids, santisers, bath products marketed a children (beware cartoon character bubble bath!).
- Wool, animal hair and fur.

Treatments

Conventional

- Topical steroids: hydrocortisone cream
- Must be used sparingly. Can be useful to bring a severe outbreak under control but not to rely on regularly.
- This cream damages the skin, causes it to thin, and can burn it if over used.
- If using regularly must cut back on this gradually otherwise withdrawal symptoms and severe flare-up can be experienced.

Natural Treatments

External/Topical

These two topical treatments usually bring relief to eczema whatever the type or cause.

1. Chickweed cream. An emulsion, not an ointment. Buy this because it is a professional level product and not suitable to make at home unless you invest in lab level equipment and ingredients.
2. Oat bath or poultice: an easy DIY treatment that usually brings some relief.

Common topical treatments to be cautious of (only to be used in certain circumstances).

1. Calendula cream: this can help some eczema but aggravates others. Especially if the skin is hot, red, angry and very itchy.
2. Coconut oil: this is heavy and seals in the heat. Again, this aggravates most eczema. If the skin is dry, cracked, sore and bleeding then a thin layer of coconut oil can help this type of eczema because it protects the broken skin.

Internal

Supplements

If the diet is deficient in essential fatty acids then a fish or vegan Omega oil supplement is recommended. Take this at the age-appropriate recommended dose for a minimum of 3 months.

Natural Internal Treatment cont.

Herbs

Using herbs that gently support the body and taking them consistently for 2-3 months will usually help to bring relief to eczema if it has internal rather than external causes.

Do not use strong herbs or 'detoxing' herbs for your child. Please stick to the gentle herbs that I recommend here. Gentle is still effective! Strong is too much for children and babies, and unnecessary.

Herbs to support the lymphatic system:

Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*)

Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)

Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)

Improving the function of the lymph also gently support the immune system.

Herbs to help elimination (kidney function):

Nettle leaf (*Urtica dioica*)

Allergy-easing herbs:

Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata* or *Plantago major*)

And Nettle leaf

Nervines: to support the nervous system and ease stress:

Oatstraw (*Avena sativa*)

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

Roses (*Rosa spp*)

Chamomile (*Chamomilla recutita*)

Nourishing and strengthening:

Plantain

Nettle

Red clover

Oatstraw

Blend the herbs together. It's a nice idea to select one herb from each group and blend them together for general support.

Dosage: Herbs to ease eczema are usually more effective as a tea than in tincture form. Please refer to the herbal tea lessons and dosage instructions relevant to the age of your child.

Length of treatment: take this consistently for 3 months. If no improvement after this then please see a qualified practitioner to help you review this and find an appropriate course of treatment.