

## **ATOPIC DERMATITIS (ATOPIC ECZEMA)**

Atopic dermatitis, also called atopic eczema or just eczema, is the name given to a stubborn, itchy rash that occurs in certain persons with sensitive or irritable skin. Eczema is common in infants and young children, and may disappear before adulthood. Eczema may clear for years, only to reappear later--often on the hands or around the eyes.

The cause of atopic dermatitis is not known. It is the result of a built-in defect of the skin that tends to run in families. Other problems that may occur with atopic dermatitis are asthma allergies, hay fever and sinus problems. Eczema is not contagious and is not related to your general health. Persons with eczema have skin that is dry and easily irritated by soap, detergents, and rough clothing. Skin tests *do not* help, since eczema is *not* due to an allergy.

Since eczema patients have a built-in skin defect, no permanent cure is possible. Fortunately, there are effective ways of controlling eczema.

Cortisone compounds applied to the skin are the best medicine for controlling eczema. Cortisone salves come in many different strengths. You can think of creams that are 1 horsepower in strength versus 1000 horsepower. In general the higher strength creams should not be used on the face, armpits, groin, and rectal area. If your eczema is widespread, you will be given one cream for the face and skin folds and a different one for the other areas.

The three main principles of treatment are the use of mild soap, moisturizers, and the prescription ointments. Mild soaps include bar soaps such as Dove/Purpose/Basis/Aveeno and liquid soaps such as Moisturel/Neutrogena/Cetaphil. It is important to keep your skin moisturized daily especially after the bath or shower. The moisturizer you use is up to you, but I often can give you some samples. The prescription ointments were mentioned above. As your condition improves, it is important to try to use the prescription medication less often.

Cortisone prescriptions are applied to the skin in the form of lotions, creams, or greasy ointments. When the skin is very dry, ointments are often best. Whatever preparation you use, be sure to use only a little and massage it in well.