

Child Eczema

Atopic eczema (sometimes called **dermatitis**) is a common dry skin condition experienced by a **fifth of babies and children**. It is **non-contagious**, and symptoms vary from **dry patches**, **scaly skin** and **itching**, to **weeping sores**, **bleeding** and **crusting**.

Eczema is more prevalent amongst families with a **history of asthma, eczema** and **hayfever** (or the Atopic Triad), and it is more common in Asian, black African and black Caribbean children.

Eczema commonly develops when **babies are 8-16 weeks old** and typically presents as **red, itchy** and **sore patches** in the creases of the skin. Eczema is different from cradle cap, which will appear on a babies' head and have a more yellowish colour and greasy scaly patches.

Child Eczema Symptoms

Many babies experience eczema symptoms when they **begin teething**. As the teeth start to push through, babies tend to dribble more, which can, in turn, irritate the skin around the mouth and chin and cause eczema.

Other times to look out for symptoms is when your child starts to eat different foods or spends time in new environments. **Pollen, animals, household chemicals, heat and new foods** could all be possible triggers of eczema. **Stress** can make eczema worse, so starting a **new school** or being **anxious** about something may cause a flare-up in the condition.

There is no cure for eczema, but it can be managed and the majority of children “grow out” of the condition by their teens.

The most common symptom of eczema is **skin dryness**. Your child may have general dry skin all the time, but they may also experience flare ups when the skin is particularly **dry, cracked, sore** or **angry**.

Alongside skin dryness, eczema can often make the **skin itchy**, and this can keep your child (and the rest of the household!) awake through the night. **Scratching the skin can cause damage**, and often make the skin bleed, which leads to further inflammation and itching and lead to the **itch-scratch cycle** which can be hard to break.

About Your Child's Skin

Skin performs a number of very important functions, such as regulating body temperature, helping synthesise vitamin D from UV action, sensing heat and cold, it waterproofs you and, vitally, it forms a protecting barrier against germs, infection and irritation.

A person's skin is constantly changing, and regenerates itself roughly every 27 days (regenerating faster when you are younger, and slowing down as you get older).

If your child has eczema, they may not be producing enough of the fats and oils needed to lubricate the skin, retain water and keep the skin plump. This is when gaps may appear between the skin cells, allowing germs, bacteria and allergens to get through and cause the irritation.

Irritation is further exacerbated by using harsh chemicals on the skin, such as astringent toiletry products. These can strip the skin of its natural oils and cause further aggravation to already sensitive skin.

How Eczema Is Diagnosed

If you think your baby or child has eczema, always seek medical advice in the first instance. Either visit your GP or talk to your healthcare visitor. They will discuss the symptoms with you and do a visual examination of your child's skin. Once you have established that your child does have eczema, then you may like to research the various methods available for alleviating their symptoms.

You may like to keep a simple diary of the severity of your child's symptoms to see if you can identify anything that might be triggering their eczema. Triggers might include things they have eaten and things they have come into contact with such as pollen, pets and other possible contact allergens. Don't make any drastic changes to your child's diet without discussing with a healthcare professional though as they may lose out on vital nutrients.



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Email: info@salcura.co.uk

Visit: www.salcuraskincare.com

Call: +44 (0)208 979 3592
