



## EcZema—The Itch That Rashes

### What is eczema?

EcZema (also known as atopic dermatitis), is basically a condition of dry, inflamed skin. It is a condition that someone is just born with, often inheriting it from a mother or father. In eczema the skin gets so dry and inflamed that it becomes very itchy, red, and scaly. The itchiness is often the worst problem, and scratching the itch often leads to infection. EcZema can show up very early in infancy or later; it can wax and wane all through childhood and adulthood—even disappearing completely for long periods of time—and can last all through one's life. *Treatment can control eczema but it can't cure it.* So when treatment stops, the itching and redness will often just come right back.

### General tips to control eczema

- Use a very gentle detergent for your child's clothing, such as Dreft.
- Don't use fabric softeners.
- Keep fingernails trimmed short, smooth and clean.
- Dress your child in soft, loose clothes. Avoid wool, which can make the itching and rash worse.
- Don't overdress. Too many clothes can cause overheating and make the rash worse.
- Use a "non-soap" without perfumes or dyes, such as Dove or Aveeno.
- Use lukewarm water for baths or showers, because hot water can make the skin drier.

### Skin Treatment

It is very helpful to establish a good skin care regimen. Here is what that consists of:

- **Use an emollient.** This would be: Vaseline, Eucerin, Cetaphil, CereVe, or Aquaphor, or even Crisco. Put it on at least twice a day, every

day, even if the eczema is not active. Be sure not to use a lotion, because lotions often contain alcohol, which can make the skin even drier than it already was. Emollients should feel slightly greasy. The best time to use them is *immediately* after patting the skin dry after a shower or bath.

- **Act quickly.** As soon as there is any itchiness and/or redness, use a small amount of topical medicine such as hydrocortisone (or a prescription steroid we have prescribed for you) where the itching and redness is. Rub the medicine in well for 10-20 seconds. Then apply the emollient *after* the topical medicine.
- **Keep using the emollient,** even when the itchiness and redness are gone and you stop the steroid.
- **Always control the itch.** The emollient and the steroid medicine will help, and you may also want to give an itch controlling oral medicine such as Benadryl or a prescription we give you, especially before bed, because itching can be worse at night.

### Allergies and eczema

EcZema is a skin condition, not an allergic condition. But sometimes allergies to food or something in the air can trigger eczema or make existing eczema worse. Seeing an allergist can be helpful in identifying these triggers as well as figuring out how to avoid them. But even if we figure this out, the eczema will still get better and worse on a cycle all its own. Interestingly, anything that stimulates the immune system, especially colds, can cause a flare.

Learn more about eczema at the website of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAA): <http://aaaai.org/patients/gallery/skinallergies.asp?item=1a>

*We pledge not only to care for you, but to care about you.*