

ECZEMA IN CHILDREN

What is eczema?

Eczema is a condition that causes the skin to be generally dry. It may also become itchy, red, and cracked.

Eczema symptoms



Itchy skin



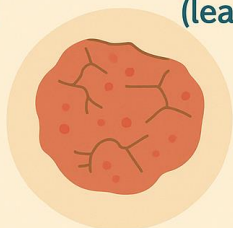
Rash



Inflamed
or red



Thickened
(leathery) skin



Sometimes cracks
or infection



Eczema (also called atopic eczema or atopic dermatitis) is a common condition that causes dry, red, itchy skin. It affects around 1 in 5 children in the UK. It's not contagious, and it's no one's fault.

Eczema tends to come and go in flares. These can be triggered by things like soap, heat, or infection. Some children only get occasional patches; others may need daily treatment to keep things settled.

The good news is that most children grow out of it - or find it becomes milder and easier to manage with age.

Why does eczema happen?

Children with eczema have a skin barrier that doesn't work as well as it should. This means their skin loses moisture more easily and lets in irritants.

The immune system also overreacts, causing inflammation and itching. Eczema often runs in families, especially alongside asthma or hay fever. Everyday things like soap, fabric, or overheating can act as triggers.

Understanding what makes your child's skin flare is an important step in managing it.

Managing eczema: what works best?

The most effective approach is a simple one: protect the skin, treat flares early, and reduce triggers. These steps really make a difference.

1. Moisturise regularly - even when skin looks clear

Moisturisers (emollients) keep the skin barrier healthy and reduce the number of flares. Use them:

- At least twice a day, more often if needed
- Generously - don't hold back
- All over the body, not just on sore patches

Keep going even when your child's skin seems fine - it's much easier to prevent a flare than treat one.

Choosing a moisturiser: Creams are lighter and easier to spread, good for mild dryness. Ointments (like Vaseline or similar products) are thicker, more protective, and best for very dry or inflamed skin. Use a clean spoon or pump dispenser to stop tubs getting contaminated.

2. Treat flare-ups with anti-inflammatory creams

During a flare, the skin needs help to calm down. Your GP may prescribe a topical steroid, usually used once or twice daily for a short time. Up to two weeks of regular application should settle things down - but if not speak to your GP as a stronger cream may be needed.

- Mild steroids (like hydrocortisone) are often used for mild eczema or eczema on the face
- Stronger ones may be needed on thicker skin like elbows or legs
- Always apply to inflamed areas after moisturising

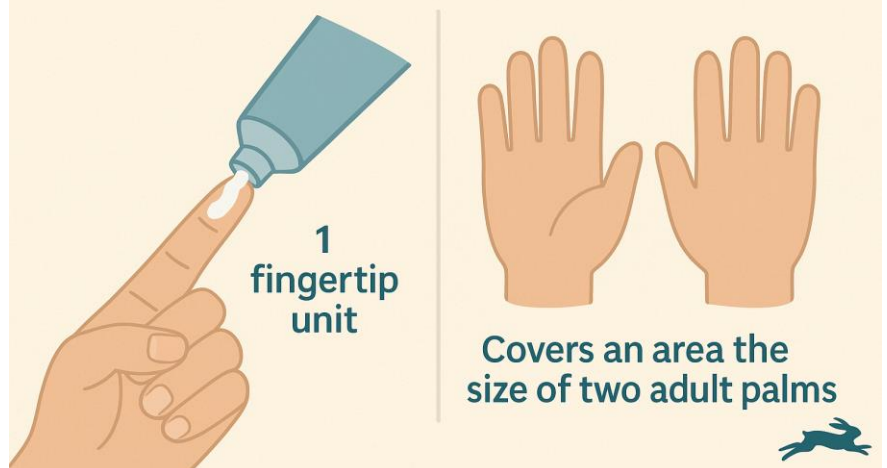
Don't worry - when used properly, topical steroids are safe and effective. They reduce inflammation and itch so the skin can heal.

How much cream to use?

How much to use?

Use the Fingertip Unit (FTU):

- 1 FTU = a strip of cream from the fingertip to the first crease
- This treats an area the size of two adult hands



3. Avoid triggers that make things worse

You won't be able to avoid every trigger - and that's okay. But reducing the main ones can help a lot:

- Soaps, bubble baths, and fragranced products
- Heat and sweat
- Rough fabrics like wool
- Scratching (short nails help – and cotton gloves at night can too)
- Dust mites, pollen, or food allergens (in some children)

Some parents find it helpful to keep a food and symptom diary or explore dust mite reduction strategies - your GP or nurse can advise if this is worthwhile.

Use an emollient instead of soap. Short showers are often better than baths.

4. Watch for signs of infection

Broken skin is more vulnerable to infection. Look out for:

- Yellow crusts or weeping patches
- Sudden worsening of redness or swelling
- Fever or if your child seems generally unwell

If you're concerned, contact your GP. Infections usually clear quickly with the right treatment.



What if it's still not getting better?

Most children respond well to the basics. But if your child's eczema is severe, difficult to control, or affecting their sleep or confidence, there are other options.

Your GP may discuss:

- Calcineurin inhibitors (tacrolimus or pimecrolimus) - non-steroid creams that work well on sensitive areas like the face. These can be prescribed for children over 2
- Wet wraps or special bandaging - sometimes used for more severe cases
- Referral to a skin specialist - if stronger treatments, allergy testing, or newer medications might help

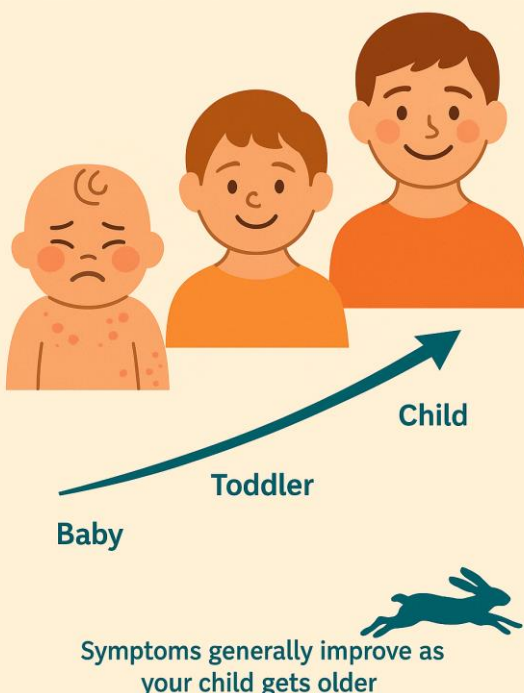
Antihistamines can sometimes help, especially if itching is affecting sleep. Chlorphenamine (Piriton®) may be used at night, and non-drowsy options like cetirizine can help during allergy-related flares.

Wet wraps or bandages may also help settle severe flares - ask your nurse or GP if these might be useful.

We'll work with you to find the best plan for your child.



Eczema in children



Will they grow out of it?

In many cases, yes. Eczema often starts in infancy, improves during childhood, and may clear by the teenage years. Even when it doesn't disappear completely, it usually becomes easier to manage over time.

The key is to build a routine that keeps the skin strong, so flares are fewer and milder.



When to get more help

Contact your GP, nurse, or pharmacist if:

- You're unsure how to use the creams
- The eczema is affecting sleep, feeding, or daily life
- Skin looks infected or is rapidly worsening
- You need support with identifying triggers or allergies
- You'd like to talk about seeing a specialist



Trusted resources

- **National Eczema Society** - <https://eczema.org>
- **NHS: Atopic eczema in children** - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/atopic-eczema/>
- **How to apply creams (video):**
<https://www.itchysneezywheezy.co.uk/>

CHG leaflets

For more help with common skin issues, you may find these leaflets useful, available in the self-help section of our website:

- [**Bites and Stings**](#)
- [**Burns and Scalds**](#)
- [**Dry Skin**](#)

Visit: cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/services/patient-information-leaflets



If you have further questions:

- **Visit:** www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/contact-us and fill out our triage form
- **Speak to your local Pharmacist**
- **Call us:** 01285 653198 or 01285 652122
- **Call NHS 111** if you need urgent medical advice (24/7)
- **Call 999** in an emergency

