

# Sensitive Skin Care

Sensitive skin problems such as dry skin, itchy skin, red skin, or skin with crusted spots are also called allergic dermatitis, atopic dermatitis, or eczema. Good skin care techniques will help your child's skin from becoming dry, irritated, or infected. Some people only have problems with their skin in the winter months. We call this winter itch, xerosis, or sensitive skin. Here are some tips from allergists and dermatologists in the Pacific Northwest community.

## Bathing

- When you or your child take a bath or shower, use cooler water. Hot water stimulates histamine release in the skin which causes itching, swelling and dryness.
- Use very little soap, and only in areas where needed.
- Reduce bath time to 10-15 minutes and do not use bubblebath.
- It's okay to take a bath every day as water hydrates the skin. The problem with frequent bathing is the soap. Don't use soap every day and moisturize right away after bathing (within 3 minutes) to lock in the moisture.
- Using the right soap is very important. Soaps can remove protective substances from the skin. The most irritating soaps are deodorant soaps and perfumed soaps. Talk to your doctor about which milder over the counter soaps are best. There are also soapless cleansers that both cleanse and moisturize at the same time.
- Never use a towel to rub yourself dry! A towel is like sandpaper. It takes away oil, skin, and moisture. You need all three for healthy skin. Simply drip dry or pat dry and leave your child's skin damp.

## Using Lotions

- Put only creams or lotions recommended to you on your child's damp skin. Even lotions and creams

can contain ingredients that may irritate skin. You can even use petroleum jelly or vegetable shortening for the same effect.

- In the winter months, you may want to use creams or ointments, rather than lotions, as they will moisturize more effectively in dry winter weather. Moisturize your child's skin several times a day!
- Prescription creams and ointments should be applied to affected areas only. Apply moisturizer to the whole body at another time. If applied at the same time as prescription ointments or creams, always apply the prescription medicine first.

## Washing Clothes

- Wash clothes, towels, and sheets with fragrance free laundry detergents. Do not use fabric softener or anti-static dryer sheets.
- Try putting your child's clothes through the rinse cycle twice.

## Extra Care

- Your doctor may prescribe medicines taken by mouth or rubbed onto the skin (topical) for the care of your skin. Apply the topical medicine in small amounts only to the affected areas. Many of these medicines contain a steroid which helps to relieve the redness and itching. Your child may also need to take an antihistamine to help with itching. Check with your doctor.
- Be very careful with make-up. It can cause

irritation. Perfume can also be a problem.

- Protect child's face and other exposed areas when outdoors during bad weather, cold weather, or sunny weather. Even "non-allergic" sunscreens can cause dermatitis.
- Adding humidity to the air inside your home is usually not helpful and may cause more problems from dust mites, mold and bacteria that grow in moist areas.

### **Itchy Skin**

- If an oral antihistamine was prescribed, use as directed. It may make your child sleepy at first.
- Redness and dryness cause itchy skin. Follow the instructions above to control redness and dryness.
- Keep cool. (Your child will itch more when he or she is too hot).
  - Dress your child in loose-fitting clothes. Covered skin itches less.
  - Keep your child's bedroom cool at night and keep covers either off or at a minimum (a sheet only, or a sheet and a light cotton blanket).
  - When an itch develops, encourage your child to resist scratching. Apply something cold, such as an ice cube, wet cloth, or just cold water (cooling stops itching).

### **Other Helpful Hints**

- Keep wool away from your child's skin: this means blankets, clothing, stuffed animals and mattress pads.
- Keep dogs and cats outside of your home.
- Use cotton clothing, sheets, blankets and pillowcases as often as possible.

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#### **For More Information**

For other concerns and questions check with your doctor.

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