

## Eczema (Atopic Dermatitis) - Fast Facts

This document has been developed by [ASCIA](#), the peak professional body of clinical immunology/allergy specialists in Australia and New Zealand. ASCIA information is based on published literature and expert review, is not influenced by commercial organisations and is not intended to replace medical advice. For patient or carer support contact [Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia](#) or [Allergy New Zealand](#).

1. Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a chronic health condition that affects the skin causing redness, itching and sometimes infections. When eczema worsens this is called an eczema flare. Usually there is no single trigger for an eczema flare.
2. In people with eczema, the skin does not retain moisture very well. Dry skin is more open to allergens and irritants that trigger the release of chemicals into the skin, making it itchy. Scratching itchy skin causes more chemicals to be released, making the skin feel itchier. This "scratch and itch" cycle can cause discomfort, disrupt sleep, and affect quality of life.
3. Eczema is a chronic health problem that affects many people of all ages, but is most common in infants:
  - Infantile eczema occurs in around 20% of children under two years of age, and usually starts in the first six months of life. Infantile eczema usually improves significantly between the ages of two to five years.
  - Childhood eczema may follow infantile eczema or start from two to four years of age. Rashes and dryness are usually found in the creases of the elbows, behind the knees, across the ankles and may also involve the face, ears and neck. This form of eczema usually improves with age.
  - Adult eczema is similar to that of older children with areas of very dry, itchy, reddened skin at the elbow creases, wrists, neck, ankles and behind the knees. It can cause rough, hard and thickened skin, which may also have weeping areas. Although eczema tends to improve in midlife, and is unusual in elderly people, it can occur at any age.
4. Many people with eczema already have other allergies, or can develop other allergies, such as allergic rhinitis (hay fever), asthma, food allergy, or dust mite allergy.
5. Studies show that infants with eczema and a family history of allergy are more likely to develop food allergy. Managing eczema well in infants may reduce the chance of children developing food allergy.
6. Eczema can be well managed, and the following steps may be used as a guide:
  - Maintain skin every day by applying moisturiser at least twice a day to the face and body.
  - Avoid triggers and irritants such as allergens, soap, perfumes, overheating and exposure to prickly fabrics.
  - Prevent and treat infections using prescribed treatments as directed.
  - Treat eczema flares or severe eczema by applying creams or ointments as soon as there is an eczema flare. Immune modulating medications and other treatments may be prescribed for severe eczema.
  - If unwell with a fever or eczema symptoms do not improve within a week, it is important to see a doctor.

© ASCIA 2023

Content updated June 2023

For more information go to [www.allergy.org.au/patients/skin-allergy/eczema](http://www.allergy.org.au/patients/skin-allergy/eczema) and the National Allergy Council Nip allergies in the Bub website <https://preventallergies.org.au/eczema/>

To support allergy and immunology research go to [www.allergyimmunology.org.au/donate](http://www.allergyimmunology.org.au/donate)