

Questions parents are itching to ask

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IN THE PAST 20 years of my pediatric practice, I have been asked the following questions many times: Does my baby have eczema? Will my baby develop eczema like me? Is the eczema due to food allergy? Is steroid cream safe? I'm worried about the side effects.

What is eczema?

It is a very common skin condition that affects about 20 percent of children. It makes children's skin dry and itchy.

We do not know what exactly causes it. Eczema often happens in people who have allergies. It can also run in families.

You know your child has eczema if he has the following:

- Dry skin, intense itching, redness and small bumps, he or she might be suffering from eczema and therefore you should seek advice from a pediatrician.
- If you suspect your baby has eczema, check the front of the arms and legs, cheeks, or scalp. If you have an older child, look at the sides of the neck, the elbow creases, and the backs of the knees.

What are the tests for eczema?

There is no specific test for eczema. But for resistant eczema, we can look for allergens such as house dust mites or some food allergens, such as eggs or peanuts.

How can you help your child to feel better?

- 1) Use copious amount of unscented moisturizers to keep the skin well hydrated.
- 2) A regular daily bath with moisturizing body wash helps to get rid of the allergens.
- 3) Scratching must be avoided – babies will rub their faces against the caretaker's clothing, older children will scratch their bodies.
- 4) Avoid being too hot or sweating too much, being in very dry air, sudden temperature changes, harsh soaps or cleaning products, perfumes, and wool or synthetic fabrics (such as polyester).

Should your baby use medicated creams or ointments?

Many parents are concerned about the side effects of steroid creams. These medicines are different from the steroids athletes take to build muscle.

They go on the skin, and relieve itching and redness. The earlier you

start applying these on to your baby, the shorter the course.

What are antihistamines?

They are the medicines people often take for allergies. Some people with eczema find that antihistamines relieve itching. Others do not think the medicines do any good.

Many people with eczema find that itching is worst at night – so it's hard to sleep. It is worth trying antihistamines if your baby is scratching a lot and unable to sleep well at night.

Can eczema be prevented?

Babies who have a parent, brother, or sister with eczema have a higher risk of getting it, too. In these babies, using moisturizing creams or ointments (starting right after birth) might help prevent eczema during the first year.

But we don't yet know if this also helps prevent eczema later on.

Can my child grow out of it?

About half of children with eczema grow out of it by the time they become adults.



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