

What is Eczema? [first draft]

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Abstract:

Eczema is a common skin problem that makes the skin red, dry, and itchy. This skin condition often appears as dry, itchy patches that can show up anywhere on the body.^A Most people who get eczema are children, but this skin problem can show up at any age. The exact cause of eczema is unknown and can be different for each person.^A This makes eczema hard to cure. However, meeting with a doctor and staying away from things that irritate the skin can help stop eczema from worsening.

Introduction:

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a long-lasting skin problem that makes the skin red, itchy, and even scaly.^B Eczema can show up anywhere on the body, but it is most common to appear on the face, elbows, knees, and hands.^C Currently, over 31 million in the United States have eczema.^C If not treated, eczema can lead to very dry skin and cracked, open sores. This can be very uncomfortable and painful for individuals.

What causes eczema?

The exact cause of eczema is unknown, but research has shown that family history, a weak skin barrier, and the immune system can all play a role.^A When going to the doctor to help manage eczema, you might hear your doctor ask if anyone else in your family has eczema or skin problems. This is because eczema often runs in families and having a parent with eczema increases the likelihood of developing eczema.

Aside from family, having a weak skin barrier is common among people with eczema.^A The skin helps protect the body by creating a barrier between the outside world and the inside of the body. This helps prevent bacteria and irritating things in the environment from entering the body. If someone has a weak skin barrier, things like bacteria can enter the skin more easily and make the skin dry and irritated. This makes it easy for eczema to keep coming back.

Beyond a strong skin barrier, the immune system also helps protect our body from the outside world.^B The immune system is a special system in the body that fights unfamiliar intruders like viruses or bacteria to keep your body healthy. Sometimes, people have immune systems that are too sensitive and attack things that are harmless. These patients often have allergies, hay fever, asthma, or eczema.^B

People with eczema have been found to have sensitive immune systems that get activated when triggers like pollen, fragrances, and grass touch the skin.^C A process known as inflammation is turned on when the immune system is activated, causing the skin to become red, dry, and irritated. While pollen, fragrances, and grass are common triggers of eczema, what triggers eczema for one person can be very different for another person.^C For example, eating certain foods can trigger eczema for some individuals. Keeping track of irritating products and avoiding triggers in the environment can help prevent eczema from getting worse.

How is it treated?

There is currently no cure for eczema, but avoiding triggers that irritate the skin can be the best way to prevent eczema. Common triggers to avoid include products with fragrances, harsh soaps, and scratchy clothing. Eczema can also be kept under control by keeping the skin moisturized with gentle, fragrance-free creams.^C When showering, avoid hot showers and harsh soaps that can make the skin very dry and weaken the skin barrier.^C Lastly, avoid scratching the skin as scratching can irritate the skin and worsen eczema.

If your eczema is really bad, a doctor may be able to help with special creams or medications. Some examples of medications that are prescribed by a doctor for eczema include antihistamines or allergy medications, hydrocortisone cream, steroid creams, and drugs that quiet down the immune system.

References:

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