



Baby eczema

Question: My name is Cindy and I just had my second child. After two months after he was born he had what doctor's call "baby acne" it eventually got worse and I eventually realized from experience that it was eczema. I treated it with California Baby calendula cream and it was very effective. At four months my baby had eczema on his arms and legs, now at six months he has it on his chest and back. I have to be constantly treating it and it gets pretty thick on his arms and legs. I just wonder if this is associated with all that's wrong with the world. Such as contamination of the air, water and food. I also have this constant thought that maybe monosodium glutamate is a factor. I wonder if you can address this growing phenomenon.

Eczema is an allergic or toxic reaction, and you are right, it seems to be a growing phenomenon.

While “baby acne” is a typical condition in infants related to the normal action of sebaceous glands in keeping your baby’s skin well moisturized and protected, eczema is truly a skin disorder. It is characterized by patches of red, dry, flaking skin with some inflamed and moist, oozing areas. If the condition becomes chronic the affected skin cells may become thick and scaly. Eczema can occur at any age. It can be short-lived or last for several years, coming and going. Emotional stress can be a trigger. As your child grows older, other allergies or sensitivities may develop. Eczema can occur on any part of the body, but is most common on the face and scalp, behind the ears, and in the creases of elbows, knees, and groin. A child with eczema has dry itchy skin that doesn’t hold moisture very well. Your application of calendula cream has no doubt felt very soothing to him. Itching can be severe, which I imagine would be particularly stressful for an infant and, of course, his mother.

There are two types of eczema: atopic dermatitis and contact dermatitis. Atopic is inherited and usually appears when an infant is 2-3 months old. Usually there are other family members with allergies and past or present eczema. It can worsen when solids or new foods are introduced or when exposed to irritants such as wool or acrylic clothing. This type of eczema often is accompanied by other signs such as facial pallor, darkening around the eyes, inflammation of the skin around hair follicles, a susceptibility for skin infections, and elevated blood levels of the immune factor IgE. Atopic eczema may be long-term.

Contact eczema is more common. It is caused by direct contact with chemicals or allergens, leading to a toxic or an allergic response. The duration and severity of contact eczema will depend upon the frequency and concentration of exposure. Common irritants and allergens include citrus fruits and juices, eggs, wheat, cow’s milk, corn, soy, peanuts, chocolate, soaps, detergents, bubble baths, shampoos, perfumes, fabric dyes, feathers, cosmetics, wool, acrylic, and environmental pollutants. Your hunch that MSG may be a cause for eczema is a good one – make sure your infant is not getting exposed to this common food additive!

Eczema itself is not caused by a virus or bacteria - antibiotics will not help, and it is not contagious. However, open lesions can become infected, especially after your child is old enough to scratch the itching areas. If you see yellow or greenish discharge from affected areas and lethargy, fussiness, or fever in your baby, seek assistance from a health professional.

Are you breastfeeding? Breastfeeding is known to reduce the incidence of eczema and other allergies. One of my clients, who has 2 sensitive-skinned red-haired boys, says she even puts breast milk directly on skin irritations, with wonderful results.

Regardless of which type of eczema your baby has, the standard, first-line recommendations are similar. Independently or with a holistic practitioner, examine your child's dietary and environmental exposures. Read all product labels carefully for the above known allergens. Eliminate all possible causes for 2 weeks. Safer foods include ones high in potassium and vitamin A or beta-carotene, such as mashed bananas and cooked carrots and leafy greens. If you are breastfeeding, you should eliminate the most common causes (cow's milk products, wheat, soy) from your diet as well.

Observe your baby carefully – does he breathe more easily? Are his eyes clear instead of itchy and irritated? Is he generally less fussy? Does he have more energy? Does he sleep better? Observe yourself – are you more at ease and happier? Our infants are reflections of ourselves more than we know!

Add foods and products back one at a time, in as pure and organic a form as possible. For example, I have clients whose babies will tolerate organic soy products, but not commercially grown soy. Try the new food or product for 3 days before adding another, since it can take 72 hours for a reaction to become obvious.

Keep a daily diary of how you and your baby are doing – it will help you recognize patterns and potentially save much discomfort, time, and effort with future children. An elimination diet can be a lot of work, depending on how familiar you are with alternatives to western dietary staples. As a coop shopper you are probably already aware of or following these recommendations.

Bathe your baby only once or twice a week to avoid stripping his skin of natural emollients. Wash cloths and brushes should not be used. Give your baby an oatmeal bath – fill a clean porous cloth with organic cut oats, put it under the warm running bath water, swish it in the bath, and then squeeze and rub the bag over your child's skin. After the bath gently rub evening primrose oil over severely affected areas. Rub a light organic oil that contains vitamin E all over your baby's body to lock in moisture.

Massage your baby with this oil once a day for moisturizing and relaxation. Herbal creams with comfrey, licorice, chamomile, or calendula can have soothing anti-inflammatory effects. Daily skin-to-skin time for you and the baby will reduce discomfort and stress.

Dress your baby in soft loose cotton clothes, washed without fragrances, dyes, or bleaches. Add an extra rinse cycle to your wash if you have that option. Exposure to fresh air and UV rays will help reduce inflammation, though UV exposure should be limited to half an hour. A cool air humidifier can be helpful in winter weather.

General nutritional recommendations for relieving and preventing eczema include: beta-carotene for tissue healing, evening primrose oil capsules for inflammation, selenium for vitamin E utilization and cell membranes, and vitamins C and E for tissue healing, and zinc for wound healing. Whether you are breastfeeding or not, your child will benefit from your wise use of these nutrients in your own and, eventually, his diet.

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