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ECZEMA (Atopic Dermatitis)

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a chronic skin condition in which a person may experience extreme itching, especially at nighttime, with periods of improvement followed by worsening. Even when eczema is well-controlled, skin may be dry and easily irritated. Do your best to follow the recommendations below in order to reduce irritation of the skin and promote healing.

Trigger Factors – A variety of trigger factors are known to make eczema worse. These include irritants such as *harsh soaps, detergents* and chemicals, as well as *heat, humidity, stress, anxiety, infection* and *allergy*.

Two of the most common sources of irritations are bathing in hot water and scrubbing vigorously with soap. Try to bathe in lukewarm water, avoid soap if possible or use mild soaps such as baby soap and baby shampoos, and pat yourself dry with soft absorbent towels. Additional measures to reduce itching and scratching include trimming the fingernails short and wearing cotton gloves at night (especially helpful in children). Moisturizers immediately after bathing will help to reduce dryness of the skin. Use of moisturizers such as Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion, Prevox, Lubriderm, or Dormer 211 will help to prevent excessive drying of the skin.

A variety of soaps such as Dove, Allenbury, Neutrogena or Petrophylic are appropriate for sensitive skin. As well, products such as Spectro Jel 609 or Cetaphil are useful skin cleansers in place of soap.

Avoid harsh laundry detergents, fabric softeners and anti-static sheets such as Bounce. Double-rinse clothing after washing to remove all residual detergent. Sweating generally causes itching, scratching and worsening of eczema regardless of whether sweating is induced by high temperature, exercise or anxiety. **Avoid** excessive room temperatures and wear light, non-occlusive clothing such as cotton instead of polyester. Keep the bedroom cool and avoid excessive bed clothing to help reduce sweating.

Food Allergies – Food allergies cause worsening of eczema in about one third of children. Typically, the major foods causing eczema in children are *egg, milk* and *peanut*. Even tiny amounts of these specific foods may cause long lasting eczema that will not heal. Other foods are less commonly implicated and skin testing and food challenges are often necessary to determine whether foods are responsible for eczema in children. Ingredients of prepared and packaged foods must be carefully reviewed to ensure that the suspected food allergens are not present. You may be asked to keep a food diary or an elimination diet to determine whether foods are contributing to eczema.

Environmental Allergies – Dust mites and cats are also often implicated in causing eczematous eruptions. Strict measures must be taken to eliminate exposure to these allergens. Try to adhere to any environmental control measures that have been recommended.