

Controlling Atopic Dermatitis

Environmental controls

How to manage the things that may affect your child's skin when they have atopic dermatitis.

If your child has atopic dermatitis, they are more likely than other children to have skin reactions to irritants and to things that cause allergies (allergens). For that reason, it is important to avoid or at least to manage your child's contact with them. Irritants and allergens are sometimes called environmental exposures.

Your child might not need to do all of these things to control dermatitis. Try the ones that are easy or seem to help the most. The main goal is to stay away from things that make itching worse.

If their atopic dermatitis is mild or moderate, then your child does not need to get skin or blood tests for allergies. Positive allergy tests do not necessarily mean that eating these foods makes your child's eczema worse. Avoid foods that clearly cause your child to have a reaction. Look for the foods that seem to cause skin flares or other problems. If there have been problems with foods in the past that cause serious problems, like lip swelling or breathing problems, it is important to prepare for reactions by having an EpiPen ready all the time.

The most common food allergies to watch for are eggs, cow's milk, soy, nuts, fish or shellfish, and wheat.

Tomatoes and citrus fruits may be irritating to the skin. If these get on your child's skin, wash gently with water. It can help to put a barrier like Vaseline on your child's face before they eat. This makes it so that irritating foods do not have as much contact with the skin.

Temperature and humidity

It is important to control the temperature in the rooms where your child spends time. It should be kept on the cool side. Overheating causes your child to sweat, and that can make the itching worse. This is also why you should avoid dressing your baby or child in clothes that are too hot or in too many layers.

Keep the humidity above 40% where possible. This helps the skin to stay moist and not to dry out more. During the cold weather and in the winter, when it is very dry inside the house, use a cool mist humidifier. Run the humidifier in your child's bedroom 24 hours a day and keep it as cool as is comfortable.

If your child has asthma, watch for asthma symptoms. The humidifier may make it worse.

Remember to clean the humidifier frequently.

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To Learn More

- Dermatology
206-987-2158
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Dust and pollution

Try to keep the house as dust-free as possible. Special filters for heating and air conditioning systems may help, but they are expensive. Keep bare floors clean and carpets vacuumed. If you can, clean the house when your child is not home. Avoid using wool carpets, blankets, drapes and clothes.

Other kinds of air pollution that your child should avoid whenever possible include:

- Cigarette smoke, including smoke on the clothes from smoking outside
- Household dust mites
- Animal dander (skin scales that pets shed)
- Trees (tree pollen can be irritating)
- Paints
- Varnishes
- Chemicals like insecticides
- Air fresheners like Febreze, incense or other strongly scented products

Other things that could irritate your child's skin

- Have your child avoid perfumes, deodorant sprays or bubble bath.
- The chlorine in the pool may be irritating. It is usually OK to swim, but it is important for your child to shower right after swimming and then to put on moisturizer.
- Avoid using fabric softeners when washing your child's clothes. Use unscented laundry products such as All Free Clear or Tide Free and Gentle.
- No one with atopic dermatitis should kiss, hold or even touch anyone with fever blisters, herpes or any kind of "cold sores." The cold sore virus, or herpes, can quickly spread over the body of someone with atopic dermatitis.