

# Eczema - Irritants

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that can be significantly influenced by environmental factors. These factors can exacerbate symptoms, including itching, dryness, and irritation. Managing eczema often involves reducing exposure to irritants and adopting appropriate skin care measures to protect the skin barrier and minimize flare-ups.

## **Skin Care and Cleansing Practices**

One of the most common environmental triggers for eczema flare-ups is the use of harsh cleansers and soaps, which can compromise the skin's moisture barrier. Traditional deodorant soaps, which often contain strong detergents and fragrances, can be drying and irritating to individuals with eczema. These soaps should be avoided or used sparingly, especially on sensitive areas such as the face, hands, and genitals. When soap use is necessary, products like Dove, Olay, and Basis are recommended due to their gentle formulation, which is less likely to strip the skin of its natural oils.

Non-soap cleansers, which are more hydrating and less irritating, are often preferred for individuals with eczema. Cleansers such as Cetaphil Lotion, Oilatum-AD, and Aquanil are excellent alternatives because they cleanse the skin while maintaining its hydration. These non-soap cleansers do not contain surfactants that can disrupt the skin's natural protective barrier. Additionally, residual laundry detergent left in clothes can also contribute to skin irritation. To reduce this risk, a second rinse cycle during laundry or the use of hypoallergenic, fragrance-free detergents such as Cheer-free or All-free may be beneficial for individuals with sensitive skin.

## **Hand Dermatitis Management**

Hand dermatitis is a common manifestation of eczema in adults and can be particularly debilitating due to its impact on daily activities. Individuals with eczema often experience increased dryness, cracking, and irritation on the hands due to frequent hand washing or exposure to irritants, including soaps, solvents, and detergents. To manage hand dermatitis, it is crucial to avoid direct contact with potential irritants. Individuals should be encouraged to limit exposure to harsh chemicals in the workplace, as well as avoid hobbies that involve irritant exposure, such as gardening or cleaning with strong chemicals.

For individuals who need to wash their hands frequently, it is essential to apply moisturizers immediately after hand washing to restore lost moisture. Moisturizing creams or ointments that contain occlusive ingredients like petroleum jelly or ceramides are recommended to form a

protective layer on the skin. Non-water-based cleansing methods, such as using Cetaphil, which do not require rinsing, may also be a helpful alternative for reducing irritation and maintaining skin hydration. Additionally, wearing gloves during exposure to irritants can provide a barrier that helps protect the skin from further damage. Barrier creams that are applied before exposure to irritants can also be effective in reducing flare-ups by providing an extra layer of protection.

### **Managing Environmental Triggers: Temperature, Humidity, and Clothing**

Environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity, and clothing fabric can also have a significant impact on eczema symptoms. Sweat is a common trigger for eczema flare-ups, as it can cause itching and irritation, particularly in areas where sweat is trapped, such as the armpits, groin, and behind the knees. To minimize sweating, individuals should try to adjust their physical activity and environmental conditions. Maintaining a relatively stable indoor temperature (68-75°F) and humidity (45-55%) can help reduce sweating and irritation, making it easier to manage eczema symptoms.

Clothing plays an important role in minimizing environmental irritation. Loose-fitting, breathable fabrics made of cotton blends are ideal, as they allow the skin to breathe and reduce the likelihood of sweat accumulation. In contrast, fabrics like wool and stiff synthetic materials can exacerbate eczema symptoms by irritating the skin and trapping moisture. Individuals with eczema should avoid wearing wool or tight clothing, especially during physical activity, to prevent triggering flare-ups.

### **Conclusion**

Environmental factors such as irritants, temperature, and clothing choices can significantly affect the severity and frequency of eczema flare-ups. Proper skin care, including the use of gentle cleansers and moisturizers, is crucial in managing the condition. In addition, minimizing exposure to environmental triggers, such as irritants and extreme temperatures, can help reduce the risk of flare-ups. By adopting these preventive measures and making appropriate adjustments to their environment, individuals with eczema can better manage their condition and improve their quality of life.

### **References**

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