

Skin Hygiene and Eczema

Your skin is a vital barrier against abrasion, chemicals, and pathogens. Proper skin hygiene is the best way to keep your skin healthy. Removing dead cells, dirt and microbes on the skin surface is key to good hygiene. At the same time, it's important to maintain the natural fats and oils (extracellular lipids) in the outer skin layer (stratum corneum).

Eczema is a loss of the protective barrier in the skin. Hydration is vital for prevention. Daily bathing, even if standing under the water of a shower of 5-10 minutes, is the best way to hydrate. Children with eczema are most commonly comfortable in the bathtub; their skin feels good to them when wet.

Once hydrated, the barrier must be replaced. After bathing, applying thick heavy cream or greasy ointment serves two purposes. First, the application of moisturizers holds the water that is hydrating from the bath. Second, it forms a protective barrier to keep things that cause irritation off of the fragile, eczematous skin.

Winter months in the northwest have a tendency to dry out the air indoors as we use our heat inside our homes, offices and auto's. Cold air humidifiers can help return some moisture to the air and is often helpful in the rooms children with eczema spend their time.

What does my skin need to be healthy?

1. Skin needs both moisture (hydration) and lipids (fats and oils) to maintain the stratum corneum layer and its protective barrier function.
2. Skin also needs a healthy mix of resident microbes to protect it from attack by disease-causing pathogens. Overly harsh and frequent skin cleansing can strip the resident microbes and allow disease-causing pathogens to multiply.
3. Reducing environmental damage (dry weather and UV radiation) can also help maintain skin health.

How should I clean my skin?

1. Frequent bathing, using cleanser only on areas needed, such as under arms, groin, face, hands.
2. Remove daily dirt and grime by washing with mild soaps and cleansers. For effective hand washing, be sure to wash for at least 10-15 seconds. Avoid harsh scrubbing actions.
3. Choose skin cleansers that contain moisturizers and emollients with mild-surface active agents and are not overly acidic or alkaline, such as Cetephil cleanser; Avoid harsh soaps and detergents because they can remove skin oils and fats, and strip protective layers.
4. Be sure to rinse your skin well after washing.
5. Pat skin dry, and don't rub.
6. Select skin care products carefully. Many over-the-counter lotions and creams have fragrances or preservatives that can irritate your skin or worsen your allergy symptoms.

How can I keep my skin moist and clean?

1. Skin cleansers with moisturizers
2. Use skin creams moisturizers Eucerin cream, Cetephil cream or petroleum jelly to moisturize your skin, especially right after a bath or shower.
3. Sunscreens can also be helpful in preventing skin damage from UV radiation.
4. Select skin care products carefully. Many over-the-counter lotions and creams have fragrances or preservatives that can irritate your skin or worsen your eczema.

Moisturizing along with topical prescription medication use.

1. Use medication as prescribed on active areas. Apply a thin layer of the prescription to clean, well hydrated skin. Application right after bathing is best.
2. On top of the medication, apply Vaseline, Aquaphor, Crisco shortening, and Eucerin cream. If area is itchy, cover with clothing.
3. Continue medication as directed until the rash is clear.
4. Once rash is clear, continue with the Vaseline type products to assure hydration.