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## Siblings of children with eczema

Brothers and sisters (siblings) of children with eczema have an increased chance of developing eczema themselves (or the linked diseases of asthma, hay fever or food allergy), but equally they may have 'escaped'.

Siblings can feel resentful about the time and attention taken up by their brother or sister with eczema. Managing eczema can be a struggle, especially if it is impacting regularly on the family's sleep. A regular routine is important for the application of skin treatments, but it is not always easy to fit family life for siblings around such a regimen.

Here are some tips to consider:

### 1. Include siblings who do not have eczema in treatment regimes

Since everyone likes to feel valued, needed, and important, try to think of fun and creative ways to include your other children. Maybe they could be involved in the skin treatments? Either applying emollient or distracting whilst you apply creams. This will help them to understand more about why their brother or sister needs extra attention and help and reduce jealousy.

### 2. Equal expectations

Discipline within a family is never easy. Personalities, individual needs and the results of discipline on the eczema may affect how this is undertaken. Decide on what are the important core matters for your family life and keep the same boundaries for each child.

### 3. Normal life

Give all your children individual attention wherever possible and help them to achieve the things that are important to them.

### 4. Sleep

Wherever possible let the child who has eczema sleep in a separate bed and preferably a separate bedroom that is cool. It is easy to give in when you are all exhausted and can't face another night of disturbed sleep. Boundaries do need to be set as some children will use their condition to gain advantage over the others and climb into their

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, Dr Ruth Murphy, Dr Jane Ravenscroft, Nurse Consultant Sandra Lawton and parents on behalf of the Nottingham Support Group for Carers of Children with Eczema

Website – [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk)

email – [enquiry@nottinghameczema.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@nottinghameczema.org.uk)

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parents' bed where they may feel comforted, but will quickly overheat due to three bodies in same bed. Reward them for staying in their own bed throughout the night. For younger children who have poor sleep patterns as a result of their eczema, this can be hard. Don't be afraid to discuss your concerns with your health visitor.

## 5. Sharing medications (treatments)

Treatments prescribed for one child should not be used for another. The only possible exception is the emollient which is unlikely to harm a sibling's skin. However, fingers in tubs of emollient should be avoided at all times or the emollient will become infected; a spoon should be used to take out the emollient required. If a sibling is curious about how some of the medication feels, or works, take this as an opportunity to explain what each medication does and perhaps the child using the treatments could be encouraged to put into words what the cream feels like when it is applied. Perhaps this could be made easier for the child by playing through each stage of the emollient routine using a dolly and ask the child open questions, such as: 'I wonder why dolly doesn't like her bath today?'

## Further information

**Sibs:** For brothers and sisters of children and adults living with long term health conditions  
<http://sibs.org.uk/>

**Cbeebies:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/article/supporting-siblings-of-disabled-children>

**Establishing sleep routines** [http://www.ihv.org.uk/for\\_families/factsheet\\_for\\_parents/healthy\\_sleep\\_routines](http://www.ihv.org.uk/for_families/factsheet_for_parents/healthy_sleep_routines)

**A story to help introduce the concept of sharing to little ones**

[http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/SLP/Joann\\_Handouts/The\\_Rainbow\\_Fish\\_PA.pdf](http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/SLP/Joann_Handouts/The_Rainbow_Fish_PA.pdf)

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