



Habit reversal and chronic atopic eczema in childhood

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When scratching because of itch repeats often enough it becomes a habit - then it can happen without itch, and *without awareness*. This is a damaging complication of atopic eczema that can prevent usual treatment healing the skin. Habit reversal is needed!



This dry, thick and flaky skin is **chronic atopic eczema:**

caused by habitual rubbing and scratching

Saying "Stop Scratching" can make things worse... and wearing gloves and keeping nails short... **may not help.**

What can work is habit reversal! Then **healing** will follow...



How to do habit reversal...*successfully*

1. Preparation

Success depends on first understanding the problem - then, making some time to solve it: perhaps 3 to 4 weeks. You may need help from others.

2. Awareness

Next, **before starting habit reversal**, awareness of what is happening is **necessary**. Over a few days a younger child is observed to see especially when, where and how scratching and rubbing is happening. For older children scratching episodes are counted on a hand tally counter and totals recorded.

3. Habit reversal

NB Start habit reversal only *after* 1 & 2 above.

For all scratching and rubbing by younger children someone needs to be there to provide simple skin-safe diversions and distractions: hand holding, drawing activities, and playing games - all without saying "stop scratching". Plans are made in advance, especially for difficult situations. Older children can help themselves by learning how to make fists for 30 seconds instead of scratching, then pinching any itch until it goes away: others help by giving positive prompts! With persistent practice habit reversal works really quickly.

4. Topical treatment

It is **important** that prescribed creams and ointments are used correctly at the same time as habit reversal.



With this **combined approach** - habit reversal and optimal topical treatment - chronic eczema can heal. Then it is **important** to know how to keep the skin in good shape by dealing **quickly** with eczema flare-ups.

Find out more about habit reversal and atopic eczema at www.atopicskindisease.com