

## Siblings of children with eczema

This leaflet is all about offering practical advice on how to balance the needs of a child with eczema with their brothers and sisters (siblings). Siblings of children with eczema have an increased chance of developing eczema, asthma, hay fever or food allergy. Some siblings might develop these conditions in time, some might never develop them, and some might already have one of these conditions, but are milder in severity. When one child has troublesome eczema, it can affect family relationships, especially with siblings. Siblings can feel resentful about the time and attention taken up caring for their brother's or sister's eczema. Siblings can be disturbed by a child with eczema scratching all night in a shared or neighbouring bedroom, and tired parents can end up giving less quality time with siblings as a result of sleep loss. 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. Boundaries do need to be set as some children will use their condition to gain advantage over the others. Decide on what are the important core matters for your family life and keep the same expectations for each child.

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, 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)

© 2017 All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission in writing from Paediatric Team, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Nottingham, NG7 2UH

1/ 34SIBS0817 Reviewed August 2017

### 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. Children may climb into their parents' bed where they may feel comforted, but will quickly overheat due to three bodies in same bed. This overheating may cause a child's eczema to flare. 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. 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?'

Like any child with a chronic health problem, balancing the needs of the child with those of their siblings is a matter of trial and error and every family will find their own right way. Involving siblings, explaining why things are done in a certain way and sticking to clear boundaries are the key.

### Further information

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

**Establishing sleep routines** <http://ihv.org.uk/for-health-visitors/resources-for-members/resource/ihv-tips-for-parents/health-wellbeing-and-development-of-the-child/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)

**Four Stories for children with eczema :**  
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/cebd/resources/psychology-and-eczema.aspx>

**Safe Sleeping :**  
<http://ihv.org.uk/for-health-visitors/resources-for-members/resource/ihv-tips-for-parents/managing-minor-illness-and-reducing-accidents/safer-sleep-for-your-baby/>

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, 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)

© 2017 All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission in writing from Paediatric Team, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Nottingham, NG7 2UH

2/ 34SIBS0817 Reviewed August 2017

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, 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)

© 2017 All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission in writing from Paediatric Team, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Nottingham, NG7 2UH

3/ 34SIBS0817 Reviewed August 2017