

Wet wrapping

Generally, this technique of managing eczema is only to be used as directed by your physician

What is wet wrapping?

Wet wrapping is a technique used in people with moderate to severe eczema in order to soothe the skin, introduce moisture and also to protect the skin from damage caused by scratching. It usually means two layers of open-weave tubular bandage applied over emollients. The bottom layer is soaked in warm water, squeezed out and then put onto the affected limb wet, followed by a top dry layer. They can be worn under nightwear or ordinary clothes during the day or night. Wet wraps are available in tubular bandage form or ready-made garments such as vests and leggings. Wet wrapping is usually done after emollients (moisturisers) have been applied to the skin first. Wet wrapping using topical steroid creams or ointments should only be done under the direction of your health care professional.

Although the evidence for wet wrappings used as a eczema treatment is not strong, many carers of children with eczema and adult patients with eczema report that their skin conditions have significantly improved (often overnight) by applying wet wraps on dry itchy eczematous skin, especially to get over a bad period.

How to do wet wraps?

Basically doing wet wraps is a bit like making a multi-layered cake with a layer of cream or ointment, a wet bandage and then a dry bandage. Apply a thick covering of emollient to the affected area and wrap this skin in the wet bandages. The moist bandages will have a cooling anti-itch effect on the skin by gradually evaporating the water from the bandages. The wet wrapping locks the moisturiser in the skin much more effectively and has a longer lasting effect. Wet wraps protect the inflamed itchy skin from the damaging effects of scratching.

Once the wet bandages are on, put on the dry bandages. The completely dry bandages should be slightly bigger than the wet bandages so that you can pull them up more easily, if you are using socks or other tubular shaped fabric for the layers. Otherwise just wrap the dry fabric firmly but not too tight on the wet wrap layer. Dry bandages serve as a further seal for the moisturiser and moist bandage, and also protect

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the clothes and linen. The combination of wet and dry wraps will usually ensure a better sleep when used at night. Make sure your child cannot remove the bandages, thus risking suffocation or other emergencies.

Leave the combination wet-dry wrap layers on for at least two hours. Make sure the room temperature is not too cold to avoid letting your child catch cold with the wet wraps on, but not too warm to make them itch. You can leave the wet wraps on for 5-8 hours too (i.e. overnight) for a more intensive eczema treatment. If the wet bandages are not wet enough (you will feel it when you are removing them) you can re-wet the wet layer by taking off the dry layer and spraying some water on the wet layer. Then put on the dry wraps again.

Remove the bandages gently and apply another round of emollient on the skin while it is still damp. Clean the bandages thoroughly to make sure they are ready for the next wet wrap treatment. Bandages or garments are quite delicate, so popping them in the washing machine inside a pillow slip will help to make them last longer.

Wet wraps are used for a few days to help the inflamed weeping skin get settled.

Precautions:

- Do not use steroid creams for wet wraps unless your doctor asks you to do so – wet wraps are air-tight ‘occlusive dressings’ so topical steroid molecules are more intensively absorbed into both the superficial and deeper skin layers. So the side effects of the steroid cream may be greater.
- Applying a wet wrap for the face is not usually appropriate and very awkward to do.
- Be careful to avoid your child getting chilled or getting tangled up in the bandages at night.

Further information:

Instructions in diagrams (National Eczema Association)

<https://nationaleczema.org/eczema/treatment/wet-wrap-therapy/>

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