


# NOTTINGHAM SUPPORT GROUP FOR CARERS OF CHILDREN WITH ECZEMA

In association with : Nottingham University Hospitals   
NHS Trust

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.

## Allergy Tests for Atopic Eczema Information for Parents

Parents often ask us if their child is allergic to something. This is because they believe that avoiding something may clear their child's atopic eczema.

'Allergy tests' are used to know more about eczema but do not usually help us to know how to *treat* your child's eczema better. Allergy tests tell us about substances in the blood, but they are not very good at telling us if your child's eczema will get better by avoiding certain things.

The best way to find out if there is something which causes your child's eczema is to take notice of the reactions your child has. For example, if your child gets itchy patches and swellings on their skin after stroking a cat, along with sneezing and a runny nose, then these are fairly reliable signs that your child is allergic to that particular cat.

Food allergies are sometimes harder to spot. If you think that a particular food makes your child's eczema worse, then avoid that food completely for 6 weeks and then, give your child that food again to see if it brings on a definite reaction. Test only one food at a time and keep a diary of reaction. **Do not experiment in this way if you think your child may have a severe reaction to foods such as peanuts – talk to your doctor first.**

Remember that atopic eczema is a condition that comes and goes quite quickly and if you are not sure if your child's eczema has got worse during the test period, then repeat the whole process again. This does take a lot of time, but it is the only sure way of finding out more about a possible food allergy in your child.

## RAST Tests

This is a blood test that tells us if your child has antibodies in the blood which could react to common substances known to spark off allergies. There are 3 reasons why a RAST test is NOT very helpful in guiding your child's treatment:


- a. what happens in the blood may have little to do with what happens in the skin
- b. what happens in the blood may be to do with another allergic condition such as asthma or hay fever and have nothing to do with your child's eczema
- c. many people who do not have eczema, asthma or hay fever have these antibodies in their blood.

For these reasons, a positive RAST test to a particular substance is not very helpful in telling us whether avoiding that substance will help your child's eczema. On the other hand, a *negative* RAST test is sometimes helpful in telling us that your child is *not* allergic to something.

website - [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk)

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## Skin Prick Tests

Solutions (liquids) are made up out of things that may cause allergies. Drops of these solutions are put on to the arm and the skin is pricked with a tiny needle. If your child's skin has reacted to any of the solutions tested, then they will get a red swelling on their skin.

This test does NOT help very much to treat your child's eczema as:

- what happens in the skin prick tests may have very little to do with your child's atopic eczema
- the skin prick test result may show another allergy linked with asthma or hay fever
- positive skin prick tests are common in people who do not have any obvious allergic disease.

Like the RAST tests, skin prick tests are not so useful in showing how your child's skin will react to avoiding a certain substance.

## Patch Tests

Sticky patches containing various substances are placed on your child's back. This type of test is used to test people with suspected **contact** eczema. For example, someone may have hand eczema due to wearing rubber gloves as they have an allergy to rubber. The rubber substance will show up as a reaction on their back 2-4 days after placing the patches on. Therefore avoiding rubber in the future should help clear up their problem.

This type of contact allergy is not very common in atopic eczema. The most common reason for your child's hand eczema getting worse are the irritant effects from contact with water, soap, sand, saliva, foods and cold wind. These effects are not allergic ones.

If you have any questions about these tests or the information you have read in this leaflet, please discuss with the doctor or nurse caring for your child.

We would not recommend you having high street or internet allergy tests because there is no evidence of their value in the management of atopic eczema.

For further advice please contact  
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Email : [pils@nottinghameczema.org.uk](mailto:pils@nottinghameczema.org.uk)  
Website : [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk)

For advice on support issues please contact the NSGCCE via the website [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk) and click on the contact icon



at the top of most pages or email us at

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