


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.

Skin Moisturisers in Atopic Eczema - Information for Parents

What are emollients?

Emollients are moisturisers and are an essential daily treatment for atopic eczema. They are not the same as cosmetic moisturisers. Emollients should be used as often and as generously as possible on all areas of skin, even when the atopic eczema has cleared. Emollients can be used on their own, or with other treatments, but should always be used more often and in larger amounts than other treatments. They can be used for moisturising, washing and bathing.

How do they work?

The smoothness and softness of the skin depends partly on the amount of water in the surface layer of the skin. The skin provides a protective barrier which prevents the loss of water and prevents the penetration of irritants (soaps, detergents, foods, extremes of temperature, infections) and allergens (pollens, house dust mite) from the environment which may make eczema flare. In atopic eczema this barrier is damaged, both in areas of skin where there is eczema and in areas of skin where there appears to be no eczema. Emollients protect this outer layer of skin by covering it with a protective coat. This keeps the water in the skin where it is needed and also helps to keep other things out. Emollients may also help eczema by dampening down inflammation so that your child may not need steroid creams so much.

How often can emollients be used?

Ideally, emollients should be used at least twice a day. Of course, you can use them more than this, especially on exposed areas of the skin such as the hands and face during daytime. Emollients should be put on exposed areas of the skin before your child comes into contact with things that may make the eczema worse such as cold weather, swimming, wet or dusty activities at school or home such as painting or gardening. In babies, it is a good idea to protect their hands and cheeks with an emollient before meal times to stop them getting sore from food and drinks. It is a good idea to keep small pots/tubes of emollient at home, work and at school so it can be used regularly. A good time to put emollients on is after having a bath when the skin has cooled down (5-10 minutes after the bath) because this is when the water content of the skin is the highest. Emollients are very safe and cannot be overused. Very occasionally, creams may sting the skin when first applied to very dry skin. This normally settles down after a few days of treatment, but if the stinging carries on, please tell your doctor as it is possible that your child is having a reaction to a preservative used in making the cream, or that your child's eczema needs better treatment.

Which one do I use?

Each person is different and the emollient that suits your child best is really a matter of personal choice. Emollients are available in a variety of formulations (ointments, creams, lotions, gels and aerosol sprays). Ointments, such as white soft paraffin and liquid paraffin in a 50/50 mixture, are greasy in nature whereas creams and lotions contain water and are more acceptable cosmetically. It does not really matter which one your child uses as long as they use it regularly. Grease-based emollients are the best as they last longer on the skin and they usually give the best results on a very dry skin. Some people find that creams are more pleasant to put on, but they do contain a lot of water, so you may need to put creams on more often than grease-based emollients. You may find you need a choice of very greasy ones and lighter emollients for different times of day or at different times of year.


What can I use for washing?

Emollients should be used instead of soaps, bubble baths and shower gels. Put them on to wet skin and rinse off with water as you would do normally when washing with soap. Emollients also come as bath oils and shower products. They can all make the bath or shower slippery, so always use a non-slip bath mat. Bubble baths, harsh soaps and cosmetics are best avoided as they can irritate the skin.

website - www.nottinghameczema.org.uk

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How do I wash my child's hair?

Emollients should be used instead of shampoo in children under 1 year old. If your child uses shampoo, it should be unperfumed, ideally labelled as being suitable for people with atopic eczema, and not used in the bath.

Summary


- Emollients moisturise and soften the skin.
- Emollients are an important part of managing the dry skin associated with atopic eczema.
- Emollients will help to protect the skin from outside irritants such as cold weather, water and detergents.
- Your child should be prescribed leave-on emollients in large quantities (at least 250 g per week).
- Your healthcare professional should offer a choice of unperfumed emollients (this could be several emollients or one for all purposes).
- If your child doesn't like a particular emollient or it irritates the skin, you should be offered a different one.
- Your healthcare professional should check at least once a year that the emollients your child is using are still suitable.
- Your healthcare professional should show you and your child how to apply emollients, including how to smooth them on rather than rub them in.
- If any other treatment is being put on the skin at the same time of day, it doesn't matter which is applied first. You should leave at least a few minutes between applying your emollients and other treatments.
- Always keep plenty of emollients at home, school and work. Get a refill from your doctor or chemist when your tub is quarter full.
- Emollients need to be used regularly throughout the day and not only when the skin looks bad.
- As with other creams, apply in the direction of the hair as it lies in the skin this prevents folliculitis (blocked and inflamed hair follicles).
- When using a bath oil or shower product, use a bath mat to prevent slipping.
- Aqueous cream should not be used as a leave on emollient.
- Emollients with oats in are not recommended for children and infants under 2 years of age.



Bandages, dressings and clothing in contact with paraffin based products, for example White Soft Paraffin, White Soft Paraffin plus 50% Liquid Paraffin or Emulsifying ointment are easily ignited with a naked flame or cigarette. So please take care near naked flames. If in any doubt please contact your healthcare professional for more details.

For further advice please contact
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For advice on support issues please contact the NSGCCE via the website
www.nottinghameczema.org.uk and click on the contact icon  at
the top of most pages or email us at enquiry@nottinghameczema.org.uk

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