



condition

Eczema & Dermatitis

class

Skin

description

The term 'eczema' describes a number of skin conditions that have similar symptoms. It is also commonly referred to as dermatitis. The most common form of eczema is called atopic eczema, which often occurs in childhood and is part of a family of other allergic or 'atopic' conditions such as **hayfever** and **asthma**. Another common type of eczema is contact eczema, caused by direct contact with a substance that causes the skin to react badly.

symptoms

These include inflammation of the skin, dryness, flaking and sometimes blisters. In its mildest form, eczema is simply a tendency to have itchy, dry skin. But in severe cases, it can affect the whole body causing itching, inflammation and extreme discomfort.

causes

Eczema is not an infectious or contagious condition. The causes of eczema are not known, but it sometimes develops as an allergic response to a particular substance (an allergen), for example, the droppings of the house dust mite are a common allergen. However, often no specific cause or trigger can be identified. In allergic contact dermatitis, culprits include nickel, rubber, dyes, glue, certain medicines applied to the skin and even plants.

treatment

There is no known cure for eczema, but regular treatments can be effective at managing it. The main treatments are emollients and topical steroids, which are applied directly to the skin. Emollients are mixtures of oils, fats and water which keep the skin moisturised. Not all emollients are the same and some contain active ingredients such as Urea which has been found in clinical trials to improve the level of moisture in dry skin. Topical steroids are anti-inflammatory medicines, which are used to bring eczema under control quickly. Other treatments include antihistamines, which help control the itching, and antibiotics, which deal with eczema that has become infected. Most topical steroids are only available on prescription and it is important to follow your doctor's advice, as there are side effects from over-use such as thinning of the skin. Other treatments include wet wrapping with bandages and light treatment.

when to consult a doctor

Seek help if you suspect you have eczema but have not yet been diagnosed. Any worsening of symptoms needs attention. Consult your doctor if the skin is weeping and fails to heal or if an infection is suspected. Eczema in the very young, the elderly and diabetics needs special attention.

healthy tips

- + Avoid wool and rough synthetic fabrics -100 per cent cotton bedding and clothing are more comfortable against the skin
- + Over-heating can make eczema worse - layer clothes and bedding so that the temperature can be adjusted
- + Use non-biological washing products as biological washing products contain enzymes, which may make skin problems worse.
- + In allergic contact eczema, try to avoid the substance that you are allergic to.
- + Special sprays, vacuum cleaners or filters and bedding systems may control irritation caused by house dust mite droppings.
- + Regular damp dusting and washing of bedding at high temperatures can help to keep level of house dust mites down

Based on information produced by: The National Eczema Society

Information line: 0870 241 3604 www.eczema.org.uk