



**PARENT LETTER**

**WINTER**

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## Winter Cheeks and Dry Skin Rashes

by Doug Puder, MD



It seems like most babies and toddlers get raw cheeks in the winter. And so many children have their dry skin break out into a rash. This is called **eczema** (*atopic dermatitis*) and it affects at least one in ten children. Most of them are under age 5 years. Eczema can be mild or it can last all season or all year. It is estimated that about 2/3 of children "outgrow" their eczema, although they may always have a tendency for dry skin. Only a few continue to have troublesome eczema in adult life.

These children have a problem in their skin barrier. The skin barrier is needed to stop water loss out through the skin. It is also meant to stop irritants, bacteria, and allergic material from getting in. Eczema runs in families and it is very itchy. Food allergy may be a factor but this is usually not the cause. Milk, egg, peanut, wheat, and soy are the most common food causes but allergy testing is recommended only for severe or difficult to control eczema.

**Maintenance of skin care:** Daily baths are ok, but keep them short, no bubble baths, and moisturize the whole body within a few minutes of getting out. Soap and all skin products must be Unscented and Hypoallergenic. Ointments are greasy but work best, creams are a good alternative. (*Cetaphil, CeraVe, Eucerin, Aquaphor, etc.*)

**Anti-inflammatory medications:** When the skin breaks out into a rash, cortisone creams are generally the next treatment. They need a prescription and are usually used on the rash areas only and for up to two weeks. The stronger creams or ointments cannot be used on the face, neck, and skin folds. Sometimes a non-steroid, anti-inflammatory cream such as pimecrolimus will also be prescribed.

**Itch control:** Non-drowsy antihistamines such as cetirizine (zyrtec) are good for daytime and diphenhydramine (benadryl) at bedtime. Do not use antihistamine creams, they can make eczema worse.

**Managing infected skin:** Lots of bacteria are present on the skin of eczema patients. Sometimes the eczema areas become infected and need prescription antibiotic cream or oral antibiotics.

If moisturizers aren't working, we should examine your baby or child in the office. We can control eczema together!

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