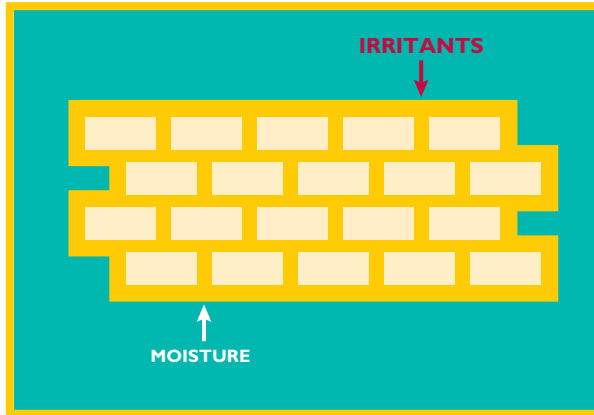


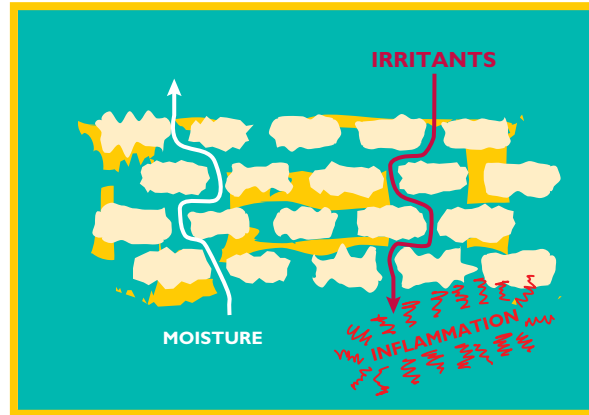
## NORMAL SKIN



In normal skin, natural oils fill spaces between plump skin cells to form a good skin barrier – keeping moisture in and irritants out.

Skin cells and the surrounding natural oils are often shown as a brick wall. The skin cells are the 'bricks' and the natural oils the 'mortar'.

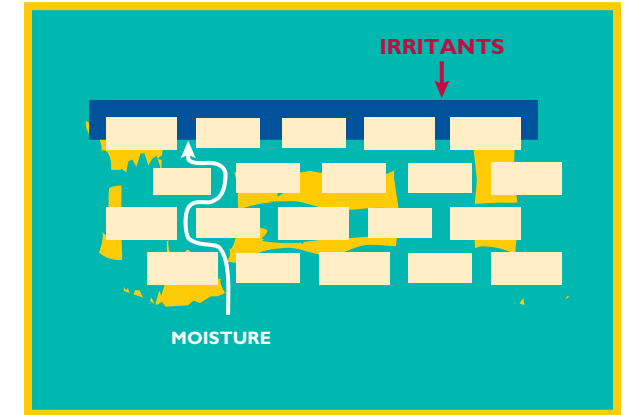
## ECZEMA – A DAMAGED SKIN BARRIER



In eczema there is a shortage of natural oils in the skin which allows moisture to escape too quickly. Also, the skin cells shrink, opening cracks which allow irritants to enter.

The skin reacts causing redness, inflammation and is very itchy. Scratching damages the skin further. This leads to more irritation, itching and further scratching.

## RESTORING THE SKIN BARRIER USING A MOISTURISER/EMOLLIENT



Emollients rehydrate dry skin by forming a layer of oil which traps moisture in the skin allowing cells to swell and close the cracks.

Emollients should be applied regularly in large amounts to moisturise and soften the skin, making it supple and less itchy. It is important to continue using emollients even when the skin appears to be better.

### What causes inflammation?

If irritants cross the skin barrier the skin reacts causing inflammation. This is the body's natural defence system to protect against its enemies (irritants and bacteria).

In atopic eczema, the body can over react and 'flare up' in response to chemicals and bacteria which would usually be harmless.

### Reducing inflammation

When the skin 'flares up' steroid creams will reduce the inflammation and redness. Continue using emollients as they help the steroids.

If the skin is red and itchy it may be due to the reaction of the skin to bacteria e.g. *Staph. aureus* which is more common on atopic skin. The doctor may prescribe a treatment to reduce the number of these bacteria and help remove the cause of irritation.

### Avoiding irritants

There are a number of factors in the environment that can make eczema worse such as heat, dust and contact with irritants such as soap or detergent.

More information about eczema is given overleaf with some helpful suggestions about avoiding irritants or 'trigger factors' that can make eczema worse.

## ATOPIC ECZEMA

About 1 in 5 children in the UK has atopic eczema and it commonly starts in babies aged 3-6 months.

For many children eczema largely resolves as they get older, and there are many ways to help in the meantime.

In atopic eczema there is a deficiency of the normally protective skin barrier, with fewer of the natural oils that help to retain moisture.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The skin can become dry, cracked, red and sore. Eczema can be confined to small patches or affect the whole body. It may come and go or be relatively persistent.

The skin is also very itchy – the main symptom of eczema – which leads to scratching further damaging the skin.

When skin becomes dry, it has less protection against irritant factors. These include detergents, chemicals and bacteria such as *Staph. aureus*, which can make the itchy eczema worse. Also, the skin can become infected more easily, particularly when damaged by scratching.

Young children find it difficult to resist the urge to scratch. Keeping nails short will help to minimise damage to the skin and anti-scratch mittens are useful for babies.

Pinching or pressing the skin is less damaging than scratching and distracting your child can help.

Symptoms can be seasonal, either improving during the summer months and getting worse in the winter, or vice versa.



## SKIN FRIENDLY HELPFUL HINTS

- ✓ Avoid having the central heating too high.
- ✓ A simple humidifier can make the air less dry.
- ✓ Air the rooms daily.
- ✓ Use a damp cloth when dusting.
- ✓ Vacuum carpets regularly.
- ✓ Use a cover on mattress, pillows and duvet – avoid feathers – where possible air bed linen in sunshine.
- ✓ Wear cotton or silk clothing rather than wool next to the skin.
- ✓ Use non-biological washing powder. NB. Washing temperatures over 58°C kill house dust mites.
- ✓ Wash and wipe toys regularly. NB. Soft toys in a plastic bag and kept in the freezer overnight kills house dust mites.
- ✓ Try to avoid contact with anything that may cause allergic reaction e.g. furry pets, detergents, chemicals or house dust.
- ✓ Do not mow the lawn while your child is nearby.

### INFORMATION ABOUT ECZEMA ACCREDITED BY THE



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(8am - 8pm Mon - Fri)

The National Eczema Society is registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales under No 1009671. The Society does not recommend or endorse any specific product or treatment.

## GOOD SKIN CARE

### ESTABLISH AN EMOLLIENT REGIME

Moisturise as often as possible – this is the most important part of skin care.

Emollients, or moisturisers help to rehydrate and soften the skin making it smooth and supple.

Improving the condition of the skin by regular emollient use reduces itching and the need for more potent steroids.

Even when the skin looks and feels 'normal' emollients should be continued and used regularly.

Emollients are available as lotions, creams, ointments and gels. Lotions are lighter than creams and ointments are greasier.

It is important to find the most suitable emollient(s) for the skin.



### AVOID SOAP AND FOAMING BATH/SHOWER PRODUCTS

Don't use soaps, bubble baths or foaming shower gels, which tend to dry and irritate the skin. If it bubbles or foams it dries the skin.

Use an emollient soap substitute for washing in the bath, under the shower or at the sink – it does not need to lather.

Bathing keeps the skin clean and free from scales and crusts. Add an emollient bath additive that is designed to disperse efficiently in water.

Wash with lukewarm water rather than hot water.

Make a note of where, how often and how much emollient to apply.

Ask your doctor, nurse or health visitor for advice.