

# Eczema and the cold

## How to avoid flare-ups this winter



### Eczema: What is it?

Also known as “atopic dermatitis,” eczema is an inflammatory skin condition that affects roughly 30% of Americans, mostly children and adolescents. Those with eczema experience dry, itchy skin that can leak clear fluid when scratched. Eczema is not contagious, but those who have eczema may be particularly at risk for bacterial, viral, and fungal skin infections. Flare-ups can arise unexpectedly, and oftentimes frequent treatments are needed. Trying to manage this condition can be quite hard and emotional for patients and caregivers.

The exact cause of eczema is unclear, but environment, genetics, and the immune system can all be causes. Eczema often is associated with allergic diseases like asthma, hay fever, and food allergies. Children with siblings are less likely to develop eczema than only children. People who live in urban areas and those with higher socioeconomic status also appear more likely to develop the disease.

Eczema in young children, especially in infants, is a major risk factor for the development of food allergies, particularly allergies to peanuts.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently approved new treatments for eczema. Speak with your dermatologist to learn more about what treatment options might be available for you. ■

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**30%** Percentage of children with eczema who also have a food allergy.

SOURCE: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

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### Winter and eczema

Though eczema flare-ups can occur at any time of year, many experience flare-ups in the winter. Cold air, wind, and a decrease in humidity dry out everybody’s skin, which can trigger a flare-up for those with eczema. Here are some tips to beat back those winter flares.

- Use a humidifier
- Moisturize right after you get out of the shower—petroleum jelly or thicker creams are better
- Avoid scented lotions or laundry detergents
- Avoid very hot showers
- Cover up as much skin as possible when going outside in the cold, dry air
- If you know you’re going to sweat, wear quick-drying fabric
- Avoid wearing wool, nylon, polyester, or spandex
- Ask your doctor about prescription therapy if symptoms persist