

# My Child Has Eczema

“It’s just a part of your life.”

“Just accept it, use the steroid cream and get on with it.”

What wise man said that? In today’s world driven by the forces of highly lucrative pharmaceutical deals it’s not hard to work out.

As a mother of two young children who have eczema I am relatively new to the world of chemicals and potions but every day I am amazed by the marketing and deception of leading cosmetic and pharmaceutical companies. So I’m not an expert in this area but I’m a mother who is disillusioned with information and treatments (or lack of) available to mothers newly exposed to this condition and are trying to deal with childhood eczema without exposing their children to a concoction of harsh chemicals.

When my son was diagnosed with eczema 3 years ago I was floored and you could say heart-broken. What mother wants to see any children, especially their own, suffering from such a harsh condition? How was this possible? I had been lucky enough to have good European skin having never suffered a rash of any sort. My son was about 5 months old when the first signs of eczema started to appear. Relative to what some children experience I would say his condition was mild to moderate, but it was severe enough for me. It did get to the stage where he couldn’t even tolerate a dip in a swimming pool or the beach because his skin would flare-up and he would cry in pain.

Several visits to different GPs and specialists later I was left with minimal information and a plan that involved using a cream to moisturise his skin but to use topical steroids up to 3 times a day during flare-ups. So as a diligent mother, doing what I thought was best, I listened and followed the instructions I was given. It worked! Within 12 hours I felt like I was managing the eczema but 3 years later am I happy with those decisions that I made? Not necessarily.



## What is eczema?

Eczema, or atopic dermatitis is an inflammatory skin condition that recurs and is non-infectious. How severe it may be is unpredictable and some parents will see Mother Nature at its worst. But is it all Mother Nature? Let's look a little closer.

The symptoms are not nice and can appear as one or more of the following:

- moderate to severe itching skin
- recurring rash, more commonly on the hands, neck, inner elbows, backs of knees and ankles than any other body areas
- rough, leathery, thick skin
- watery fluid leaking from skin
- lesions that expose the skin to bacteria and viruses.

After my son was diagnosed allergic to nuts and we started to carry an EpiPen for his risk of anaphylactic shock, I started to look even more closely into what is in everything we use in our home...full of toxins despite being quite a health-conscious family. According to fit for life online's Naturopath/Nutritionist Winona Stephens baby products today are "full of all sorts of chemicals like mineral oils and sodium lauryl sulfates and lots of colouring agents to make it look pretty. They are often petroleum based. The baby's skin is like a sponge so in essence you are assaulting their skin from day one. Basically you are doing the opposite to what you think you are doing by buying these popular brands."

I for one, was one of the one's convinced that I was buying the best for my baby. As Ms Stephens says, "They are so popular because of clever marketing". They aren't banned because trials haven't proven anything in the long term yet because in an orthodox perspective they don't make that association...the association between ill-health and these products." As a mother I am flabbergasted by how easily fooled so many of us are.

My son is now completely free of eczema and so is my daughter (although admittedly she never suffered as badly as he did and question myself daily as to why that is). Ok, whether or not I could say they are cured is beyond the scope of my knowledge but I do know that their skin is clear – always. I can only hope that it stays that way. According to Ms. Stephens the reasons for this are "as a child the body is still building its immune system and working out its homeostasis. They may not have the right enzymes to break things down. Doing something like giving them a digestive enzyme and some fish oil can make a world of difference. As they grow their bodies can learn to deal with it and some mothers see their child outgrow eczema."

I don't claim to know it all but I now stick to products that have product names that I can understand! If there is a number in brackets (indicating something artificial) it goes straight back on the supermarket shelf. I now find I purchase my cleaning and cosmetic products online and in my local health food store.

Two major things I stay away from are parabens and sodium lauryl sulfate.

Parabens are apparently this is the most widely used preservative in cosmetic products as well as food and drugs. Its purpose is to protect against microbial growth. Today the most common parabens are methylparaben, propylparaben and butylparaben.

Sodium lauryl sulfate is used in cleaning products such as toothpastes and shampoos. It's also used as a food additive (thickener and emulsifier), and a dispensing agent in creams, lotions and pharmaceutical products. It can cause severe irritation to the eyes and skin. To think we have this in our shampoos! Repeated exposure to such products may lead to dermatitis in those who are at risk.

Funny how the products I was using for my son (including soaps, creams and washing powder) all had these products in them!

Slowly, slowly my house is changing. I don't purchase any products that have words on the ingredients list that I do not understand or recognise. I also try to buy organic where possible. So while my home is still not chemical free we are on our way. My first changes were in washing powder and skin care and I haven't looked back.

There seems to be a preconceived idea that good skin care is in the world of the rich and famous. Not so. Remember good marketing is everything in the world of creams and potions. Do some research and your skin and your child's skin will be rewarded.

Risk factors for eczema:

- Family history of eczema, asthma or hay fever
- Stress
- Some foods and alcohol (as a parent you may have found a link between your child's eczema and dairy, wheat products, citrus fruits, eggs, nuts, seafood, chemical food additives, preservatives and colourings.
- Allergens such as house dust mites, plant pollens, pets, clothing, soaps, shampoos, washing powders, cosmetics and toiletries.

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