



atopic dermatitis

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*Atopic dermatitis, a chronic skin condition, is common in children and requires treatment to minimise frequent flares. Dr Ker Khor Jia, consultant dermatologist, explains what parents need to know.*

As a parent, seeing your child in discomfort can be heart-wrenching, especially when you're unsure whether a rash is just a minor irritation or something more serious. Conditions like milk rash, **baby acne**, cradle cap, and **diaper rash** can all seem alike to an untrained eye. But when should you be concerned that it might be atopic dermatitis?

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## What Is Atopic Dermatitis?

Atopic dermatitis, often referred to as **eczema**, is a common skin condition that can cause significant discomfort for children. Atopic dermatitis typically presents as dry, itchy, and inflamed skin, and while it's common in young children, it can persist into teenage years and even adulthood. As a parent, it's essential to understand how to manage this condition effectively to improve your child's quality of life.

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Atopic dermatitis is more than just a rash; it is a chronic condition where the skin becomes extremely dry, leading to irritation and inflammation. In Singapore, atopic dermatitis is one of the most common skin disorders, affecting an estimated 20% of children and 11% of adults.

### **Causes of Atopic Dermatitis**

The exact cause remains unclear, but factors such as genetics, impaired skin barrier function, and environmental triggers play a role. Children with atopic dermatitis may also have other allergic conditions like asthma or hay fever, suggesting a link to the immune system. This condition is not contagious, so there's no need to worry about it spreading to others.

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- **Dry, cracked skin:** This is one of the most noticeable symptoms. The skin may feel rough, tight, and appear scaly.
- **Intense itching:** Atopic dermatitis is often called “the itch that rashes” because the itching can be severe, especially at night, affecting sleep and daily activities.
- **Rashes:** These can appear anywhere on the body but are most common on the face, elbows, and behind the knees in children. The rash may be red and swollen, and in some cases, it can become thickened or darker due to continuous scratching.
- **Bumps that ooze and crust over:** In some cases, small raised bumps may appear, which can ooze fluid and then crust over. This is more common during flare-ups.

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Pregnancy Parenting Child Feeding & Nutrition Education Lifestyle Events Holiday Hub Aptamil To avoid flare-ups, it's important to avoid triggers that can cause flare-ups. While there's no cure, these strategies can help keep the condition under control and reduce its impact on your child's life.

## Moisturising Is Key

The most important step in managing atopic dermatitis is to keep your child's skin well-moisturised. Moisturisers help to restore the skin's natural barrier, which is often compromised in children with this condition.



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Once diagnosed, your doctor can help develop a management plan that may include non-medicated therapies like emollients, medicated treatments such as topical corticosteroids, or newer treatments like biologic therapy. Biologic therapy, a steroid-free alternative, can reduce the severity of symptoms and is even approved for children as young as six months.

## Avoid Common Triggers

Identifying and avoiding triggers is crucial in managing atopic dermatitis. Common triggers include

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and skin products

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## Takeaway

Atopic dermatitis is a common condition, but with the right care and management, your child can lead a comfortable and active life. Regular moisturising, avoiding triggers, and using prescribed medications can help manage the symptoms and reduce flare-ups. By understanding atopic dermatitis, you can take proactive steps to support your child and improve their quality of life. Remember, as a parent, you are your child's greatest advocate, and working closely with your child's doctor is key to helping them find relief and enjoy a better quality of life.

*Updated by Matt Doctor*

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