

Information about eczema

What is eczema?

Eczema is a condition that often makes skin dry, flaky and sore. In lighter skin, eczema may look red. In darker skin, eczema skin may look grey, purple, or brown. The main problem is itch, which causes people with eczema to scratch. It can be really uncomfortable and upsetting. It can affect people's mood, concentration, and make sleep difficult.

What causes eczema?

There is no single cause of eczema. We know that eczema can run in families. Someone with a family history of eczema, asthma or hay fever may be more at risk of developing eczema. It is usually caused by a mixture of things. In people with eczema, their skin reacts differently than people without. This makes their skin dry and it overreacts to things in the person's surroundings, such as soaps and washing up liquid. Eczema is not contagious – you can't catch it.

How is eczema treated?

There is no cure for eczema, but there are lots of things people with eczema can do to help control it. People with eczema need to regularly put on moisturising creams (emollients) to protect their skin. Flare control creams (usually steroid creams) are sometimes needed too. People with eczema should avoid things that can make their eczema worse. Some of these things include: soaps, certain chemicals, being too hot, contact with water or dust, and stress. People with eczema should also wear clothes that are soft, smooth and breathable.

What are the main problems at school, college, university or work?

People with eczema can usually do everything that people without eczema can. But some tasks may be more difficult and may make their eczema worse. People with eczema may need to take extra steps to help them with these tasks and to look after their skin. Some people have eczema on their hands. This can make it painful to write for long periods of time (e.g. in exams or meetings). They have to put creams on their body at least once a day, which can make their hands slippery.