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• ATOPIC DERMATITIS / CHRONIC ECZEMA.

Atopic dermatitis is a chronic skin allergy condition defined by constant dry skin and the presence of a red, extremely itchy rash, usually located on cheeks, and creases of elbows, wrists and knees, although it can spread to other areas including neck, ankles and feet. This illness is usually inherited and may be related to a history of asthma, hay fever, or a family history of eczema.

1) TREATMENT:

- i) Bathing and Skin hydration: this is the main way to prevent a "flare-up"; your child should have one bath daily for about 10 minutes, remember that water soaked skin is less itchy; avoid soaps and other irritants; soaps may become necessary until adolescence and then Unscented Dove, Lubriderm or Cetaphil skin cleansers could be used.
- ii) Lubricating Creams: these patients always have dry skin and lubrication is very important, the lubricating cream should be applied after bathing over the entire skin surface while it is damp, recommended lubricants are Cetaphil, Keri, Nivea, Lubriderm and Nutraderm moisturizing creams. Another excellent product, especially for older children and adolescents is VANICREAM.
- iii) Steroid Creams: steroids are the main treatment for eczema and itching, it must be applied according to the pediatrician's instructions, especially at the first sign of a "flare-up".
- iv) Oral antihistamines: sometimes, prescription antihistamines such as Atarax or Zyrtec may be helpful for relief of itching, but these medications are not the main therapy.

2) PREVENTION:

- i) Breastfeeding is essential; otherwise hypoallergenic formulas will be a good substitute, such as Nutramigen, Alimentum or Neocate.
- ii) Cotton clothes should be worn as much as possible; avoid wool fabrics and clothes made from rough or scratchy materials.
- iii) Avoid triggers for eczema "flare-ups", such as soaps, bubble baths, pool chemicals such as chlorine, dry air (use a humidifier), excessive heat, or excessive cold.
- iv) Keep your child off the grass during pollen season.
- v) Keep your child away from anyone with fever blisters because Herpesvirus can cause a serious skin infection.
- vi) Keep your child's fingernails cut short.
- vii) Avoid certain food products that may be related to skin allergy and eczema, such as cow's milk and dairy products in general, eggs, peanuts and peanut butter, wheat cereal and whole wheat products, fish and seafood, citrus juices and citrus in general, such as tomatoes.
- viii) Avoid products that can block the sweat glands and therefore worsen the rash and itch, such as thick ointments, petroleum jelly, vegetable oils.

3) Call the office if:

- i) The rash gets extremely red or itchy, and becomes raw looking.
- ii) The rash appears infected, i.e. yellow pus discharge, scabs, red streak marks over the skin.
- iii) The child develops a fever or presents with fever blisters.
- iv) There is no improvement after 7 days.