Eczema
(Atopic Dermatitis)

Definition
Eczema (also called atopic dermatitis) is a chronic inflammation of the outer layers of the skin.

Causes
The exact cause of eczema is not known. Factors that may contribute to eczema include:

- Genetics
- Environment
- Allergies

Risk Factors
Eczema is more common in people of African or Asian descent.

Other factors that may increase the chances of eczema:

- A personal history of asthma or allergies
- Living in urban areas or places with low humidity
- A family history of eczema or allergic disorders
- Exposure to certain fabrics, perfumes in soaps, dust mites (common), or foods
- Stress, especially if it leads to scratching
- Frequent washing of affected areas
- Use of rubber gloves in persons sensitive to latex
- Scratching or rubbing of skin
- Medications that suppress the immune system
- Excess weight or obesity

Symptoms
Eczema symptoms vary from person to person. Scratching and rubbing can cause or worsen some of the symptoms. Symptoms include:
- Dry, itchy skin
- Cracks behind the ears or in other skin creases
- Red rashes on the cheeks, arms, and legs
- Red, scaly skin
- Thick, leathery skin
- Small, raised bumps on the skin
- Crusting, oozing, or cracking of the skin

**Diagnosis**
You will be asked about your symptoms and medical history. A physical exam will be done. The diagnosis is made by the appearance and location of the rash. You may be referred to a specialist.

**Treatment**
The main goals of eczema treatments are to:

- Heal the skin and keep it healthy
- Stop the itching
- Prevent scratching or rubbing of the affected skin
- Avoid skin infection
- Prevent flare-ups
- Identify and avoid triggers

Treatment options may vary. Your doctor may recommend more than one depending on your condition. They include:

**Skin Care**
Proper skin care may allow the skin to heal. Treatment may include:

- Avoiding hot or long baths or showers. Keep them less than 15 minutes.
- Using mild, unscented bar soap or non-soap cleanser. Use it sparingly.
- Air-drying or gently pat drying after bathing. Apply gentle moisturizer when your skin is still damp.
- Treating skin infections right away.

**Medications**
In some cases, medications may be needed. Examples include:

- Prescription creams and ointments containing cortisone, tacrolimus, pimecrolimus, or crisaborole
- Prescription or over-the-counter antihistamines to help prevent itching
- Antibiotics applied directly to the skin or taken by mouth in order to treat infections
- Oral medications to reduce inflammation
- Monoclonal antibody injection to reduce inflammation

**Phototherapy**
If skin care and medications are not effective, light therapy may be used. This may include:

- Treatment with ultraviolet light
• Adding psoralen, a medication used to sensitize the skin for light therapy

Prevention
Eczema is difficult to prevent, especially if there is a family history.