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How to Keep Your Baby's Skin Smooth This Winter

Dear Parents,

As the outdoor temperature got much colder in the past month, many of us reached for our home thermostats, we should remember not to neglect the largest organ in our bodies.

Amazingly, the largest organ in our body is not the heart, kidneys or brain. It is our **skin**.

As many of our readers have noticed, their baby's soft, cute and chubby cheeks have roughened a bit. It is not a coincidence that the change has appeared in the past month. I have been reminding many parents over the summer months that this change is eminent and have given them some useful tips to prevent and deal with the harsher weather.

If ignored or mishandled, the dry skin can turn into **eczema**. For the readers unfamiliar with the condition, eczema is a form of inflammation of the outer layer of skin known as the epidermis. Patients with eczema have extra sensitive nerves that make them feel much more itchy than regular people.

Causes of Dry Skin and Eczema

1. Genetics - Eczema has a very strong genetic component. Parents who have a history of eczema with eczema should be extra careful with their kids.
2. Soaps – We use soaps to remove grease of our dishes. Hand and body soaps will also remove the protective layer of oil that our body makes, leaving our skin more dry, cracked and itchy.

3. Perfumes – most perfumes are made of alcohol derivatives. Alcohol is one of the most drying and irritating agents available. Perfumes are found in many household products (i.e. detergents, creams, soaps).
4. Dry air – as you may have noticed, your throats may have been extra dry when you woke up this week. This is because the heat in your house has removed much of the humidity from the air. The warm, dry air will also cause your skin to feel dry and irritated.
5. Food Allergy and eczema – here is a sensitive and controversial point. Many times skin or blood tests may show that a baby has a food allergy. However, the tests alone are not reliable enough, and may entirely miss the point when it comes to eczema. If you feel that your child's skin has dramatically dried after eating a certain food, despite taking all the measures that I will mention below – then discuss the possibility with your pediatrician. The best food allergy test for eczema is what you see at home (do not test your kids allergies at home if they have severe allergies to milk, peanuts or other foods).
6. Over Bathing – the warm water we bath in dries our skin. This is especially true in the winter, because when we exit the shower, our warm and wet skin dries ever so quickly. In warmer, more humid climates people shower up to three times daily (try the Caribbean islands for example).

My “Ounce of Prevention”

Here are some tips I like to share with parents. I will mention specific brands of household products, so I would like disclose to you, that I have no association with any of these companies whatsoever.

1. **Moisturizers** – try and moisturize your baby twice daily. You don't have to be too generous with the moisturizer, just make sure that you thoroughly *rub it* into the skin. Don't leave a layer *on top* of the skin – it serves no purpose other than greasing your clothes. Pay close attention to the cheeks, elbows, and the area behind the knees as these areas tend to be more prone to dryness.

Moisturizer Brands I Recommend:

- ❖ Vaseline – Original only. The best bang for your money.
- ❖ Aquaphor – A more expensive version of Vaseline
- ❖ Eucerin – original is the thickest and best.

*Please avoid all good smelling moisturizers – their perfume will dry and irritate the skin.

2. **Bathing** – lower the temperature of your baby’s bath. Give your children shorter baths. Pat dry (don’t rub dry) their skin right after leaving the bath. Studies show that kids with eczema may benefit from bathing but *only if* the parents moisturize the skin *right after* the bath.

Hair & Body Washes I Recommend

- Eucerin Hair & Body Wash
- Cetaphil Hair & Body Wash
- Arbonne Hair & Body Wash

3. **Humidity Control** – to avoid over drying at home:
 - ✓ Set your home thermostat not higher than 70 degrees Fahrenheit.
 - ✓ Leave the window in your room slightly open (may prevent the croupy cough as well).
 - ✓ Use a cool mist humidifier as needed.

4. **Clothing** - make sure that your child’s sensitive skin does not come in contact with wool or polyester fabrics. Try and dress your child in 100% cotton clothing. To stop your child from scratching, you may try to cover their hands with cotton mittens or socks (I am sure you have seen infants wearing their socks on their hands).

5. **Early Treatment** – I often mention the notorious vicious cycle that afflicts eczema patients: the dry and irritated skin makes the child feel itchy. The child scratches the skin, causing further damage. The damaged, excoriated skin loses its natural barrier to infection and loses its ability to lock in moisture. This brings on further irritation and more itchy sensations.

Therefore, if you take the above mentioned precautions and you find your baby still dry and itchy, see your pediatrician and get a prescription strength cream that will stop the vicious cycle and alleviate the situation before it’s too late. Your doctor could use much milder creams if you present the rash early on. Once your child has started to scratch, the skin may require more potent medicine.

Hope you find these tips useful for you and your children!

