

Atopic Eczema: Sun, Holidays and Fun – Information for Parents

Will my child's eczema get better or worse on holiday?

Eczema affects children in different ways, so it is hard to predict how your child's eczema will behave on holiday. Generally, most children improve on holiday as everyone is relaxed and having fun. Some children find that heat can make their eczema worse, especially when they sweat a lot. Others find that a bit of gentle sun and sea clears their eczema completely for a while. Everyone is different.

Things to think about when taking your child on holiday

As eczema is a dry itchy skin condition, there are many things that may irritate the skin, i.e. wool, some food, sand, wind, pollen, water and extremes or changes in temperature. A child with a lot of eczema covering most of their body may not be able to sweat as effectively as other children, or they may find that the sweat makes their skin itch more. **Dry heat and low humidity can cause problems for children with eczema, as do sudden changes in temperature and humidity.** So, to make sure things go smoothly for your holidays, remember to think about the following:

Supplies Remember to order enough supplies for all your child's treatment well in advance. Even if your child's eczema is under control, remember to take your eczema treatment kit with you.

Emollients In hotter weather, you may find a less greasy cream will be better during the day as some children find a very thick greasy emollient makes them hot and itchy.

Swimming Water can irritate eczema skin. Even so, many parents find that the seawater actually helps their child's eczema. Salt water may have a mild antiseptic action. If your child goes swimming, please put on their emollient before swimming, and put on more emollient immediately after they shower at the end of swimming.

Sunscreens Eczema reddened skin may be more vulnerable to sun burn and so will skin which has been lubricated with an emollient. This should not be taken as a reason to stop using an emollient, though. Put on the emollients and then put on sun protection around half an hour later (but before the child goes into the sun). And that application of sun protection will need to be reapplied every two hours and again after your child has swam.

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, Dr Ruth Murphy, Dr Jane Ravenscroft, Nurse Consultant Sandra Lawton and parents on behalf of the Nottingham Support Group for Carers of Children with Eczema

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Choosing a sunscreen Many sun creams will irritate the skin. Reading ingredients list on the label is essential. You need to find one that is fragrance-free, protects against UVA and UVB and is labelled as hypoallergenic. (The trouble is there is not a standard definition of what constitutes hypoallergenic – so each product labelled this way may still contain things to which your child’s skin could react). For additional information regarding sun screen types and ingredients National Eczema Society: <http://www.eczema.org/factsheets.html>. Testing a sun cream or sun block should be done gradually, in advance of the holiday. Try it on an area of the child’s eczema free skin and check the result after a few hours. Try it on a small area of eczema skin and do the same check. If there is no reaction after 24 hours, try it over a wider area of skin. Different parts of the body may react differently. Your child’s skin type and colour will affect what sunscreen protection factor you need to use, but generally SPF 30 or over is recommended for children. A lot of skin irritation from sun creams is due to undertreated eczema rather than something in the sun cream making it worse, so make sure you treat your child’s skin properly before you go away.

Cool cotton clothing Cotton clothing is ideal for children with eczema and does offer some protection from the sun.

Sun safety It is important that all the family take extra care in the sun and avoid burning. Remember S.H.A.D.E.

Seek the shade between 11am – 3pm

Hats on with wide brims and neck protection

Apply SPF 30 or above

Don’t burn

Exercise care

Further information:

- National Eczema Society: <http://www.eczema.org/factsheets.html> Sun and Eczema
- <http://www.sunsmart.org.uk/>
- www.nottinghameczema.org.uk

- British Association of Dermatologists <http://www.bad.org.uk/site/734/default.aspx>
Sunscreen and sun safety factsheet

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