



ECZEMA & SCHOOL



Going to school can cause a great deal of stress in children with eczema and it is also a big wrench for parents as they will pass on the care of their child to someone else. By the time children attend primary school, they are old enough to realize that their skin is different from other children's. It is very important that parents, family members, teachers and school staff must understand the stress these children experience and that these children may need more emotional support and understanding. It is something we all have to cope with and this booklet is an attempt to make the transition as easy as possible.



Going to School with Eczema: What can parents do to help?

by Katie Sillar - B Psychological Science (Hons), University of Queensland

Aside from the daily challenges of managing their child's skin condition, it is very likely that, at some stage, parents will also need to help children deal with the adverse psychological effects associated with eczema. In an Australia-wide study I conducted in 2011, one of the most frequent concerns reported by parents of children with eczema was the negative social and emotional aspects of the disease, such as children feeling embarrassed and self-conscious about their appearance during flare-ups.

Similarly, other recent research has shown that appearance-related teasing and bullying of children and adolescents with eczema is emotionally harmful and damaging to the victim's self-esteem and self-image, and that this can exacerbate feelings of self-consciousness.

School children with eczema commonly report being subject to derogatory remarks, name-calling, and social exclusion or ostracism by peers, with the latter often due to the mistaken belief that eczema is a contagious illness. Furthermore, even relatively innocent comments (such as "What's wrong with your face?") have been shown to cause emotional hurt and poor self-esteem.

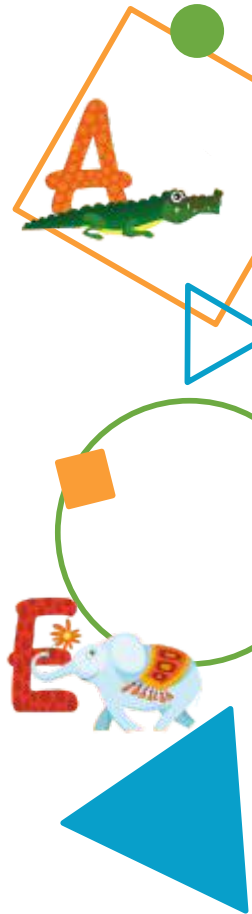
So, how can parents of children with eczema help them to cope with taunting and bullying in the playground, and protect kids from negative psychological fallout?

Firstly, it is important for parents to recognize that teasing and bullying of children with eczema is common and that it is a good idea to prepare their child for the possibility of this happening. Also, parents should discuss their child's condition with teachers at school, so that teachers are aware of the potential for bullying and can be appropriately vigilant of the situation.

Psychologist Evelyn Field's book, "Bully Blocking: Six Secrets to Help Children Deal with Teasing" (Finch 2007), has some excellent suggestions for helping children develop resilience in the face of appearance-related teasing.

Field says that children need to learn to regulate their feelings (such as managing anger and fear), try to understand why they are bullied, work on building self-esteem (by learning to like and accept themselves as they are), become a confident communicator (for example, using positive body language and clear speech), create a "power pack" (a list of come-backs and strategies) to help deal with stressful encounters, and develop a support network of people who care about them, such as friends and family.

Field also suggests that children focus on their strengths (for example, a good sense of humour), and be assertive about organizing social outings. As always, parents requiring further assistance should consider approaching an appropriately trained psychologist who can offer individualised advice and provide social survival skills training tailored for their child.



Talking with the teacher



You are about to pass on the care of your child to a teacher who may have experienced eczema but may not have experienced the level of the condition that your child has. The only way to build an understanding of this is by talking to the class teacher and the Principal. You have cared for your child on a one-to-one basis, and the class teacher cannot possibly be expected to maintain that level of care.

Approach your child's new class teacher and ask for a meeting. Make a list of the things that you need to mention and hand a copy to the teacher

Your list should include:

- **Your child's normal routine** - emphasize how much time you spend at home treating your child as this will give the teacher a perspective on how much time your child 'loses' in a day.
- **Sleeping habits** - a child who is up once in the night will be tired in school the following day; a child who has woken every half-hour scratching will be exhausted and may need to come in to school late some days in order to 'catch up'. This will certainly need consideration when it comes to taking part in tasks, tests or assessments at school.
- **Medications** - it is helpful to take samples in of all the medication that your child is currently using as well as any medications they may need that you have on repeat prescriptions (for example, antibiotic creams for infected eczema). Explain to the teacher how and when they are used and, if your child is wet wrapped, explain to the teacher what this involves.
- **Medical history** - explain to the teacher when and how (if you know!) the eczema developed, and how often they have visited and need to visit the GP, a specialist, or have been admitted to the dermatology ward.
- **Activities** - highlight activities that may lead to exacerbations: painting, clay, washing their hands with soap and drying with paper towels, getting too hot doing PE, getting too hot/cold outside, etc...
- **A doctor's note** submitted to the school if the eczema flares up suddenly and unexpectedly and affects the child's exam, either through pain or a lack of sleep.

Make sure that the teacher points out to the class that eczema is not contagious, and discusses some of the problems the child with eczema may encounter from other students. It is crucial that the class understands that a person with eczema is an ordinary person, just like everyone else and that people's reactions can be a bigger nuisance than the eczema itself.

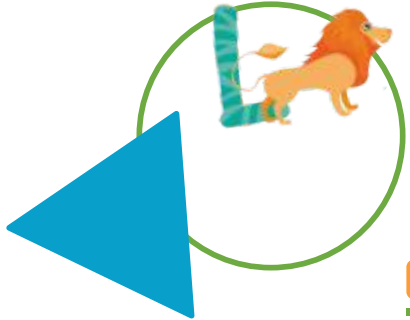
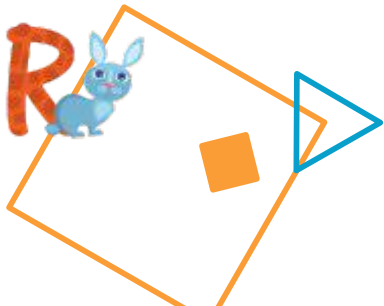
Whatever arrangement you may come to, it is of the utmost importance that the child is considered at all times. The object of the exercise should be to ensure that the child is cared for and happy so that they progress to the best of their ability in the education system.

Eczema Management Check List

List of topics to discuss with School Staff

Make a copy of this list for school staff and keep the original for your reference

Date	Eczema Topics	Importance	
		Very Important	To be aware of
Emergency contact name: _____			
Phone number: _____			



This is possibly one of the biggest concerns, if not the biggest for parents of children with eczema.

Bullying increases the level of stress your child is put under and consequently it can increase flare ups and the severity of your child's eczema, ultimately this can turn into a vicious cycle.

For children, the risk of being bullied because they have eczema is more prevalent in primary school than it is in high school. As children enter into puberty, they begin to face common skin conditions such as acne. Most children develop some sort of empathy, it is 'not cool' to make fun of someone's appearance.

Besides the tell tale rash and looking "different" from other smooth-skinned children, what invites the most bullying and teasing is the activity of scratching.

Many children with eczema are psychologically bullied. This type of bullying can take place at school, during extracurricular activities or even online. If your child is being emotionally or psychologically bullied because of his or her eczema, you'll have to look beyond the surface to see the signs.

Keep in mind that signs of bullying can easily be confused with some unpleasant side effects of eczema such as: mood swings, social withdrawal, headaches and stomach aches.

Mood swings

Without doubt, many children with eczema, experience mood swings. However, if the behaviour is beyond the norm for your child, you should look into the possibility that he or she may be dealing with a bully. Crying spells that seem to come out of nowhere, sudden outbursts of anger or erratic reactions to routine challenges may be indicative of a bullying situation.

Social withdrawal

Children who are suffering from bullying or intimidation may withdraw socially. If you notice that your child suddenly loses interest in some of his or her favourite activities or interests, distances him or herself off from friends or refuses to participate in social opportunities, it may be reason for concern. Sometimes bullied kids will request to drop out of sports or to even move to a new school. If your child seems less outgoing or more anxious about social interaction than he or she normally is, then you must delve deeper into the situation.



Headaches, stomach aches and more

Children who are being bullied often fake illnesses to avoid school or other activities. Additionally, the stress from bullying can cause actual illnesses, frequent headaches, recurring stomach aches and other health issues. If your child has a dramatic change in his eating habits, such as binge eating or skipping meals, it may also be a warning sign that bullying is taking place. Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, running away, self-destructive behaviour and talks of self harm are also warning signs that something serious may be happening in your child's life.

What to do

Many kids being bullied feel helpless and humiliated. Therefore, it can be difficult for them to tell their parents or anyone else about the situation. They may fear backlash from the bully, judgment from their peers or rejection from their parents. If you suspect your child is being bullied, talk to him or her from an angle of support rather than accusation. Make your child feel safe and try to avoid a dramatic emotional reaction. Remind him or her of the right to feel safe and happy, and applaud their courage to take a stand.

It may be beneficial to ask your child what they would like you to do about the situation or what they think may help to resolve it. They may well ask you themselves to approach the school, although chances are they may want you to not get involved at all for fear of any repercussions. Talk through ideas on how to approach the problem and the best, most effective ways you can deal with it. If your child feels they have found the solution themselves it may really boost their confidence and teach them a lifelong skill.

If your child is too afraid to talk to you about the bullying, despite encouragement, then it may be necessary to take the issue into your own hands. Talk to the teacher, school counsellor and principal as soon as possible. If you don't get enough support from the school, don't be afraid to go higher up to the Department of Education. When a crime has taken place or you feel your child is at risk for immediate harm, call 000 or head to your local police station.



Kids Help Line

☎ 1800 55 1800



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www.bullyingnoway.gov.au



Beat Bullying

www.beatbullying.org



Reach Out

www.reachout.com.au



National Centre
Against Bullying

www.ncab.org.au



Lifeline

☎ 13 11 14

Eczema Stages

By Andrea Matisan – Clinical Nurse Educator

Eczema can manifest itself in three stages; acute, subacute and chronic, as described below. Each stage can vary in intensity and duration depending on multiple factors such as: seasons, medical treatments, age, diet and other allergies to name a few.

Acute stage

Acute refers to the fact that the rash has just started. Some characteristics of acute eczema include:

- Blisters and very red skin
- Very itchy

Subacute Stage

The subacute stage is a transition between the acute and chronic stages. The eczema rash evolves and takes on these new characteristics:

- Flaky skin that isn't as red as the acute stage
- Cracks in the skin
- Itching is not as intense but the skin can burn and sting

Chronic Stage

The chronic stage occurs after the rash has been present for a long time. There is no specific time when eczema turns from subacute to chronic. Chronic eczema is different from the other two stages in the following ways:

- Thickened skin, or scabs with a wrinkly effect
- Cracks in the skin
- Excoriations / Abrasions
- Intense itching resumes

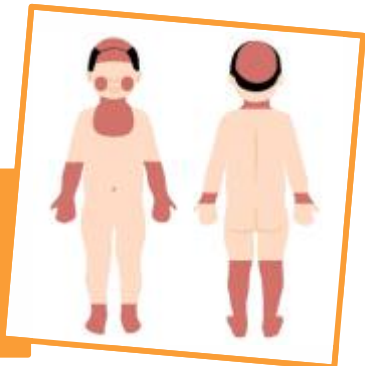
Call an emergency number if the rash becomes raw, is bleeding or becomes infected - you see pus or soft yellow scabs accompanied by fever.

ATTENTION!

Children with eczema are often affected by other health conditions such as asthma, food allergies and hay fever. They can be life threatening and must be taken very seriously.



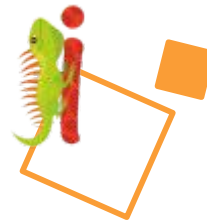
Common Sites
of Eczema
in Children



Steps to take to decrease eczema flare-ups at school

Certain steps can be taken to help decrease the chance of eczema flare-ups at school:

- You may want to ask the teacher to seat the child away from sources of heat such as sunny windows, radiators, and air vents.
- If the school has plastic chairs, having a towel (named) to sit on is often a good idea.
- If there are school uniforms, you may want to ask if a cotton alternative would be okay. Wool and synthetic fibres make the itch so much worse.
- Certain activities in the classroom may make the symptoms of eczema worse, such as using glue, paint, clay, foods, wood, and metal. Gloves may be the answer, but make sure the school knows that PVC gloves are going to be better than rubber and consider using cotton gloves or PVC ones with cotton inside (less sweaty and irritating).
- Emphasise no soap or hot air hand dryers. Give your child eczema soap and a cotton towel (named) to take to school to dry their hands on. Clean hands are essential to put cream on.
- Sitting on dusty floors and carpets can also cause unnecessary aggravation. But if you don't mention this, it's unlikely the school will realise it.
- Talk to the physical education teacher to see if certain activities need to be adapted to your child's needs. If needed ask doctor for a note excluding from certain activities. Our own sweat can be a trigger so it is necessary for a child with eczema to be able to wash using an emollient after games. (The same goes for swimming and chlorine.) Children with bad eczema may be sensitive about how they look so privacy for changing is something you need to mention. Ensure your child's sport teacher understands to allow time after the lesson for your child to shower and apply emollients.
- If needed ask your doctor for a note excluding your child from certain activities.
- Also, make sure the school is aware of all food allergies that your child has. Make sure the child is aware of what to avoid.
- If daytime moisturizing or steroid creams are needed, have a doctor's note giving permission to allow the child, teacher, or nurse to apply it at school. Moisturizing can be applied as often as you want to and the steroid is restricted. Color-code their tubes if necessary - green for go (emollient), red for think about it (steroid)
- Keep fingernails trimmed very short, so that even if scratching occurs, it will be less likely to damage the skin.
- Dressing your child in layers is a great idea so they can stay comfortable and not overheated.
- Arrange for your child to have an occasional 'sleep-in' after particularly disturbed nights, allowing them to arrive at break having previously telephoned to inform the school of their late arrival.



My School's Name:

.....
.....

WE HAVE ECZEMA

The bad side:

- ⊗ Eczema is very itchy and makes our skin red
- ⊗ To protect our skin we need creams and gloves
- ⊗ Sometimes eczema is very bad and we cannot play, go to school or sleep

The good side:

- ⊗ Eczema cannot be passed on, so we can still have fun together



The Eczema Friendly Lunch Box

This is an edited extract from «The Eczema Diet» by Karen Fischer

While children with eczema can be allergic to a range of foods, there are a number of non-allergy foods which can exacerbate the itch, such as salicylate-rich fruits and flavoured chips. You can help to minimize itchiness during school by avoiding the foods your child may be allergic to and by swapping itch-promoting lunch box items for eczema-friendly ones. For example:

Swap this...

Margarine (all types)
Flavoured dairy milks
Grapes, strawberries, kiwi, oranges etc.
Lollies and sweet biscuits
Chips and flavoured crisps
Flavoured crackers
Honey, chocolate spreads and jams
Juices, soft drink and cordial



For that

Pure butter (no additives, no oils)
Organic soy milk or rice milk
Banana, pear and papaya
Home-made pear muffins
Spelt chips (see recipe)
Plain rice crackers (no additives)
Rice malt syrup
Filtered water

It's also best to avoid artificial colours, flavours and preservatives.

This is a sample two-day menu. You will need to adjust the menu and portion sizes to suit your child's age, appetite, allergies and feeding ability:

Morning Snack

1 banana; pear muffin; plain rice crackers (no additives)
Spelt chips (see recipe) with hummus dip; vanilla soy yoghurt with added diced papaya or pear

Lunch

Free-range chicken, carrot and iceberg lettuce wrap* (see Spelt Flat Bread recipe)
Home-made chicken noodle soup with carrot and celery (supplies protein and fibre, and vegies make it an acid-alkaline balanced meal)

*Wheat can sometimes exacerbate eczema symptoms so you can try using spelt breads or gluten-free alternatives. Healthy foods such as carrot and celery sticks can also help to minimize itchiness, so encourage your child to try them in their lunch box or after school.

REMEMBER to pack a water bottle, plus a freezer block if packing yoghurt, chicken, lamb, tofu or seafood, as there is an increased risk of food spoilage if these items aren't kept cool.



Spelt Flat Bread

Makes 5 wraps; spelt contains gluten so if your child is gluten intolerant use gluten-free bread instead.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon rice bran oil
- 1 1/4 cups plain spelt flour, plus extra
- 1 teaspoon finely ground quality sea salt
- 2/3 cup boiling hot water

- 1 In a bowl, mix the spelt flour and the salt. Add the rice bran oil and the hot water and mix using a knife. Lightly flour your chopping board and knead the dough for about 3 minutes until smooth and elastic. Cut into 5 balls.
- 2 On a floured board, roll each ball with a rolling pin to make large, very thin circles. Heat a large non-stick frying pan over high heat and cook each flat bread for 1 minute each side, popping the bubbles as they appear. Turn heat to medium to avoid burning. For soft wraps cook them quickly.

Spelt Chips

Preheat oven to 180°C (355°F). Follow the instructions above but add a sprinkle of salt to each wrap before placing them into the frying-pan. Cut wraps into triangles (about the size of a corn chip), and bake in the oven for about 10 minutes or until crisp and lightly golden.



Our Eczema Experience at School

by Amanda

It was somewhat ironic that the day I was asked to write this article was the day that my son came to me in tears saying that he didn't like having eczema and that people teased him about it at school.

This came as quite a surprise to me. At seven years old Nicholas is generally quite accepting of his eczema, although of course he wishes he didn't have it. He is great at self-managing his condition at school and his classmates and friends are very understanding. This was the first time I'd seen him quite so upset by it.

As it turned out, it was some other children in the school yard who were teasing him about wearing his gloves at lunchtime. Fortunately these incidents are few and far between and we can help him to deal with them when they occur. But the fact remains that no child really wants to be different from the rest and singled out because of it, and when you have eczema you are often noticeably different.

I would class Nicholas's eczema as a medium severity. It's always there, but is greatly improved from the time when he was younger and his skin was often infected. We're also fortunate in that he doesn't require hospitalisation to treat it. Unfortunately for him, his hands are often one of the worst affected areas and this can have an impact at school.

The challenges Nicholas faces as a result of his eczema change as he moves through the school system, and so have the strategies we employ to deal with it. From our experience, the keys have been communication with the teachers, an endless supply of white cotton gloves and moisturising cream and encouraging him to self-manage his eczema at school.

When Nicholas was at pre-school and kindy the sandpit was his favourite place to play. Particularly on hot days, this would lead to irritation and exacerbate his eczema. Things like play dough and finger painting could also be painful if his hands were bad. Much of the time we decided it was more important for him to enjoy participating in these activities and playing with the other children and we would deal with the 'fallout' of broken and irritated skin at home. Emotional stress, such as missing out on what the group is doing, can be worse for his eczema than the physical irritations. When we could cajole him into it, we were happy to have him wear cotton gloves in the sandpit, so he could still play but his hands were protected.



Since starting school we have been fortunate that all Nicholas's teachers have been extremely supportive in helping manage his eczema during the day. In talking about eczema in the classroom they have encouraged classmates to see it as something that is there, but no big deal – it's just a part of who Nicholas is. They modify activities if necessary to ensure he can still participate but avoid those things that will irritate his skin. And importantly, they tell him what a great job he does by putting cream and gloves on his hands when he feels he needs it, rather than them having to check all the time.

Last year he and his teachers also developed a sign – forefinger and thumb curved around in a 'C' shape – for when he needed to get up and put cream on his hands during mat time, without having to disturb the group. Again, this has helped him to self-manage his eczema without making a big fuss in the classroom.

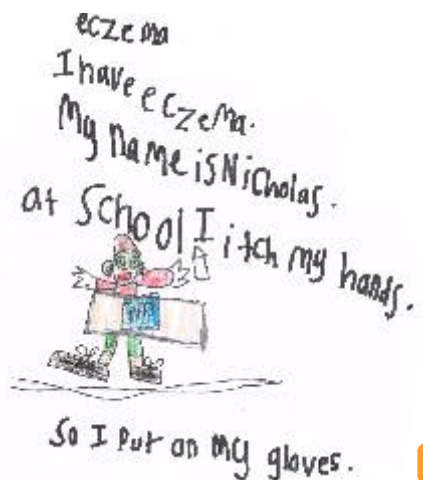
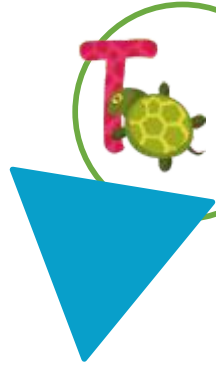
Heating and air conditioning of classrooms can be a problem as they are often either too hot or too cold. Layered clothing is important and Nicholas keeps a face-washer in the classroom that he can wet and put on his neck if the eczema he has there starts to flare up. On particularly hot days he will often seek out the library or gym at lunch-time to keep cool.

Holding a pencil is painful if Nicholas has cracks in the creases of his fingers. This can make writing more difficult and less appealing. He can't really wear gloves and properly hold the pencil so we encourage him to wear them whenever possible if his hands are bad, but take them off to write. He decides whether he needs to wear his gloves outside to play.

While there are always challenges, most of the time he manages really well and sometimes even gets to feel a little bit special! Last year the junior primary used gloves the same as his for a dress up activity at sports day and this year his class became historians and used the same gloves to protect the fragile objects they were examining. Winning The Allergy Shop's drawing competition has also given him the opportunity to stand up and tell his class about how other children had entered to share their eczema experiences

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No doubt further challenges lie ahead, but like everyone else we just try to take it one day at a time and make Nicholas's time at school about learning and fun rather than eczema.



Eczema and risk of infections

by Andrea Laura Matisan - Clinical Nurse Educator

Children with eczema have a very sensitive skin with abrasions that can get infected very easily.

Ensure the teacher understands the dangers of a child with eczema coming in contact with infectious diseases such as impetigo/school sore (bacterial infection caused by *Staphylococcus Aureus*) or cold sores/herpes simplex (viral infections).

Children suffering from eczema are far more prone to acquiring these diseases and the healing period can often be longer with possible complications.

Impetigo



Impetigo is a skin infection caused by *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus* bacteria. It is commonly known as 'school sores' because it typically affects school-aged children. Impetigo is more common during the warmer months. *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus* bacteria can live harmlessly on and inside various areas of the body, such as on the surface of your skin and in your nose. However, cuts and abrasions generally caused by scratching-typical in eczema sufferers, may allow the bacteria to embed itself into the deeper layers of your skin. The initial lesions of impetigo are small blisters with clear yellowish fluid. When the blisters burst, they form honey-coloured crusts, which are characteristic of this disease.

Impetigo is highly contagious. A child with impetigo should be kept home from school or day care until placed on appropriate treatment. Impetigo requires treatment with both topical creams and antibiotics taken orally.

Cold sores



A cold sore is a skin infection that is caused by a virus called herpes simplex.

The herpes simplex virus that causes cold sores is very common and very contagious. Cold sores can be passed from one person to another through skin-to-skin contact. It also spreads via saliva or mucus that comes from the nose and mouth. Symptoms develop 4 to 5 days after being infected with the cold sore virus. Every so often the first attack is very mild and you will hardly notice it. You may feel generally 'off' for a few days as the virus can affect your whole body. You may get swollen glands (lymph nodes) under your jaw and a fever. You may also feel a bit sick or have poor appetite. Blisters or cold sores will then break out around your mouth. After the first attack, the virus lingers-hiding in nerves within the skin or around the eyes. Some people only have one or a few attacks, while others have regular, painful attacks. The first sign that a cold sore is on the way is a tingling sensation and itchiness, usually around the lips or mouth. At times it can be felt around the tongue, gums or the insides of cheeks or eyes. Blisters then break out in the same spot and these later become dry and crusty.

This virus can infect eczema, giving rise to a condition called **eczema herpeticum**, which can cause serious illness, especially when the immune system is already weakened. Seek medical advice if you have a compromised immune system or if you experience a particularly severe outbreak and a persistent fever.

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