

Too many baths may contribute to eczema in babies

By ACSH Staff — November 5, 2014



Eczema (atopic dermatitis) typically appears on the face and

scalp of babies and on the backs of elbows and knees of children. The chronic itchy skin condition usually develops before the age of eighteen months, when a baby's skin is still developing, and lasts sometimes through adolescence or even adulthood, in which case it is often associated with atopy (allergic proclivities). While redness and itching can be reduced by prescription ointments, there is no cure for the condition. The American Academy of Dermatology estimates that between 10 and 20 percent of children are affected by eczema.

Some recent research has found genetic links to eczema, but there is also increasing evidence that environmental factors can lead to the condition. One possible cause, discussed in a [recent article](#) ^[1] in *The Wall Street Journal*, is excessive bathing of infants. The article references Dr. Eric Simpson, MD, associate professor of dermatology at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, who says, "The more we understand about the causes of eczema, the more it seems how we take care of the skin of babies may be relevant."

In a [study](#) ^[2] published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, Dr. Simpson and colleagues tested whether the use of moisturizer reduced the incidence of eczema in infants who were at high risk due to family history. The study included over 120 infants who were divided into two groups. The parents of the infants in the first group were instructed to apply fragrance-free moisturizer all over their babies' skin once a day. The parents of the second group were asked not to use moisturizer on their infants. When the infants were six months old, the incidence of eczema in the non-moisturizer group (about 40 percent) was about twice that of the moisturizer group (about 20 percent).

Dr. Simpson plans to conduct more studies to test if other skin-care practices could help prevent eczema in infants, including bathing the infant no more than three times per week using small amounts of fragrance-free cleansers. Both these methods are recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. However, in a [report](#) ^[3] published in September, Dr. Simpson and colleague Xiang Gao found that baby bath and shampoo products were used at least five times per week per household. "People are bathing their babies too much," Dr. Simpson concludes.

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross said, "It's natural for parents, especially new ones, to pamper their little ones,

and I believe frequent bathing may well be one manifestation of this urge to safeguard. Now we have reliable evidence that too much bathing is not beneficial. We hope that this useful information is well-publicized to pediatricians and GPs and that they encourage parents of infants to go easy on the bathwater.

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