

How to do wet wraps for eczema

When to use wet wraps for your child's eczema

If topical creams, dietary changes and supplements aren't enough to heal your child's eczema you may want to talk with your child's provider about starting wet wraps. Your child's provider may also want to start wet wraps right away if your child's eczema is severe enough that he/she is nighttime scratching or if the skin barrier is fragile to the point of getting infections.

Why wet wraps?

One of the main issues with eczema is that the skin loses its ability to retain moisture. When the skin dries out severely then it leaves tiny cracks or breaks in the skin, which makes the skin more susceptible to infection. In the past we used to recommend children to avoid bathing because soaps strip the skin of natural oils, making eczema worse. Now the recommendations have changed; **we now recommend kids to bathe daily or even up to four times daily** to rehydrate the skin. Wet wraps *after* the bath help seal and lock in the moisture so the skin has a chance to heal naturally before it begins to "crack" and dry out again.

How to do Wet Wraps

1. Have your child soak in warm (but not too hot!) bath water for at least 15 minutes. Do NOT use detergent-containing soaps. In fact we recommend using NO soap until you can find a hypoallergenic, mild moisture-rich soap that your child does not react to. Be aware that when eczema becomes severe some children will begin to react to many or all plant-based products. For now it is best to skip the soap all together. If the child has eczema on his/her head then periodically pour warm water over the head or put a wet washcloth on the head to increase moisture to the affected area. Disinfect the bath and bath toys frequently to avoid spreading infection!

2. Help your child out of the bath and gently towel dry. Use a clean, dry towel and a gentle patting motion. Make sure you keep those towels clean by washing them often (2+ times per week) in hot water and hypoallergenic, unscented laundry detergent or other laundry soap.

3. If your child has been prescribed a topical steroid or compounded medication apply this quickly *only* to the severely affected areas.

4. Immediately apply topical barrier moisturizer to the rest of your child's skin. Try to make sure you get your child lathered in moisturizer within *minutes* of getting out of the bath.



(Step 4 continued...) Your child's physician should be able to help you decide on which topical barrier cream, ointment or salve is best for your child. Again, try to make sure you get your child lathered in moisturizer within minutes of getting out of the bath. **Use a thick layer of moisturizer and don't bother to rub it in all the way.** You should be able to visibly see the lotion as a thick layer on the skin. Do NOT use moisturizer over the topical steroid or compounded medication.

5. Keep the moisturizers / creams / lotions clean! If you are using a tub (e.g., Vanicream, Chickweed Salve) always use a clean spoon to scoop out ointment. Do NOT use your fingers in the tub! Do NOT double dip! This prevents the spread of infection to healthy skin.

6. Apply antibiotic/antifungal medication or herbal salves to infected areas last (if needed). Do not spread this medication to uninfected skin, and make sure to wash your hands thoroughly after applying the medication.

7. Soak 100% cotton clothes in warm water. For children with widespread eczema you can use fitted pajamas. For children with eczema only on their hands, feet or small affected areas you can use 100% cotton socks, gloves, gauze or strips of cloth. **Wring out the excess water (so it is damp) and apply the damp clothes or help your child into the wet pajamas.** Kids hate this step, I know! Heavily bribe or encourage them with sticker charts for rewards, or screen/tablet time (which is a great motivator for a lot of kids). www.adrescuewear.com sells wet wrap pajamas if you have a hard time finding some near you.

8. Immediately cover the wet layer with a dry layer. Many parents use fleece or flannel footsie pajamas to completely cover their child.

9. Keep your child in the wet wraps for at least 1 hour, preferably overnight. Keep your child warm!

How often? How long?

Wet wraps work best when you apply them daily (nightly, preferably). Yes, we know, some kids really hate them! If you can't get them to stay in it overnight then we recommend doing wet wraps in the morning or mid-day and keeping them in it as long as possible. Sometimes kids will be distracted by toys or screen time. (We know that screen time is not recommended for young kids, but if eczema is really severe and this is the *only* way to get them to keep the wraps on for an hour then it's worth it!)

Eczema typically gets better within 2 weeks of regular use. Keep it going as long as possible! Some parents will be able to reduce the frequency of the wet wraps to a few times per week as "maintenance" therapy.

Final notes

If your child is using topical steroids to manage his/her eczema please be aware that they may get rebound eczema if you abruptly discontinue them. Many times wet wraps make the eczema so much better that parents stop the steroids all at once and are then surprised when the wet wraps suddenly "stop working." We highly recommend *slowly* discontinuing topical steroids over the course of weeks rather than stopping all at once. Your child's doctor should be able to help you figure out a way to "wean" off of topical steroids.

