

# Feeling Your Best with Atopic Dermatitis



## Tips for coping with the challenges of atopic dermatitis

**Disclaimer:** Pfizer is committed to supporting the quality of life of patients with atopic dermatitis through resources intended to facilitate the dialogue between patients and their healthcare providers. This piece is for informational purposes only and should not replace professional medical advice or treatment. Always consult your healthcare provider for guidance regarding your condition.

### Mental health and atopic dermatitis

Living with atopic dermatitis (eczema) can impact many parts of your life,<sup>1</sup> including how you sleep,<sup>2</sup> how you function at school<sup>3</sup> or work<sup>2</sup>, and how you see yourself.<sup>4</sup>

All of this can affect your mental health,<sup>1,2</sup> which is your ability to enjoy life and deal with day-to-day challenges.<sup>5</sup> If you're finding it difficult to manage, there are things you can do to help you feel more in control and cope better with the stress of daily life.



### Dealing with the challenges of atopic dermatitis

How you choose to cope depends on the particular challenges you experience. Here are some common challenges for people with atopic dermatitis and tips for dealing with them. Remember to always follow your doctor's advice.

#### Worries about appearance

Some people with atopic dermatitis experience social stigma that leads to feelings of embarrassment.<sup>4,6</sup> This can affect how you feel about yourself and impact your quality of life.<sup>4</sup>



#### Tips to try

- Studies show that learning to accept the reality of your condition can reduce worries about how others see you.<sup>7,8</sup> You might want to try some mindfulness activities,<sup>8</sup> such as meditation<sup>9,10</sup> or spiritual contemplation.<sup>11,12</sup> Over time, this can help you live more fully and freely.<sup>8</sup>
- It may also be helpful to practise keeping your focus on what's most important to you outside of your appearance. Focusing on your personal values can lower the distress caused by stigma.<sup>13</sup>

#### Trouble sleeping

It's common for atopic dermatitis to disturb sleep. The stress of having the condition may keep you from falling asleep, or you might be woken up by itching and discomfort.<sup>2</sup> Lack of sleep can have a negative impact on how you function and on your overall mood.<sup>2,14</sup>



#### Tips to try

- Talk to your doctor about what could help for you.<sup>2,15</sup>
- Make sure to follow your treatment plan, even when you're not having symptoms, as this can help reduce how often symptoms come back and the discomfort that keeps you awake.<sup>16-18</sup>

## Stress and low mood

Stress plays a role in inflammation, which can impact the skin barrier and make flares more common – creating a stress-flare-stress cycle.<sup>6</sup> People with atopic dermatitis are also at higher risk of low mood, depression, and anxiety, which might be linked to the way inflammation works in the body<sup>19</sup> as well as other factors like lack of sleep.<sup>3</sup>



### Tips to try

- Deep breathing may be helpful as it can slow your body's stress responses.<sup>20</sup>
- Keeping active can also help – for example, regular physical activity can reduce stress and improve mood,<sup>21</sup> while yoga has been shown to improve emotional and behavioural management.<sup>22</sup>
- Writing a journal<sup>23</sup> and doing hobbies and other activities you enjoy may also help improve your mood.<sup>24</sup>

## Staying connected

Feeling connected to other people is important for your mental health. Try not to let your atopic dermatitis get in the way of spending time with friends and family, attending social events, and connecting with others in your community.<sup>27</sup>



## Difficulty with focus and attention

Living with atopic dermatitis can affect your mind as well as your body, especially when you're having trouble sleeping. You may have difficulty focusing and paying attention at school or work.<sup>25</sup>



### Tips to try

- In addition to addressing any issues with your sleeping,<sup>2</sup> there are some exercises you can try to improve your focus. One simple place to start is by sitting still and focusing on different parts of your body in turn over 10-15 minutes.<sup>26</sup> This can build up your ability to concentrate and help you ignore distractions.<sup>26</sup>
- Mindful breathing and meditation may also be helpful, as both are shown to improve attention and reduce stress and anxiety,<sup>20</sup> while regular physical exercise is shown to improve learning and memory.<sup>21</sup>

## Finding support

If you're still having a hard time coping with negative feelings like anxiety and depression, it's important to seek help from a mental health specialist.<sup>15</sup> In addition to counselling, talking to someone you trust, such as a loved one,<sup>7</sup> a friend, or someone in your community, can really help.<sup>5</sup> If you still need more support, help is available. Your doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers can offer advice and guidance. If you'd rather talk to someone else, there are organisations who want to help.<sup>28,29</sup>

# Temperature, Humidity, and Atopic Dermatitis

## Caring for your skin in different environments

### Why does the environment matter?

Climate factors, such as temperature and humidity (moisture in the air), may play a role in the development and severity of atopic dermatitis (eczema).<sup>30</sup>

Many people notice that their skin symptoms change from season to season, or when they travel to a different climate.<sup>31</sup>

Here's what you can expect in different climates and how to manage any change in your symptoms.



### Did you know?

It's a good idea to be cautious when using any new products on your skin, such as sunscreen. To do a self-patch test, apply a small amount of product to a patch of skin twice daily for 7-10 days and watch for a reaction.<sup>32</sup> If you experience a reaction, stop using the product and consult your doctor.



Because symptoms tend to be worse on areas of skin that aren't exposed to sunlight, some people believe that a lack of vitamin D worsens atopic dermatitis.<sup>33,34</sup> If you don't get much natural sunlight, you may want to talk to your doctor about taking a vitamin D supplement.<sup>33</sup>

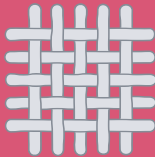
Atopic dermatitis may make it harder to control your temperature, particularly during sleep.<sup>35</sup> Wearing light, breathable clothing may help keep you cool at night<sup>30</sup> and prevent itching from disturbing your sleep.<sup>36</sup>





### Did you know?

Some fabrics irritate the skin because of their fibres. Wool and polyester have rigid fibres that cause friction, while silk and cotton have soft fibres that reduce friction and allow for the absorption of sweat<sup>37</sup> – so you might find some fabrics more comfortable than others.<sup>37</sup>



## Cold and dry environments

Cold, dry climates can cause the skin to become dry or irritated, increasing the risk of flares<sup>33</sup> and making itch worse.<sup>38</sup> Itching is not only annoying – it can also make everyday life extremely uncomfortable.<sup>39</sup>

### What makes it worse?

If you live in a colder climate, you will probably spend more time indoors. Indoor heating may trigger or worsen the symptoms of atopic dermatitis.<sup>30,40</sup> Humidity also tends to be lower indoors, which can aggravate your symptoms.<sup>40</sup>

## Skincare for cold climates



### Cleansing

Cleansing is an important step in preventing skin from becoming infected.<sup>37</sup> Have regular baths or short showers in warm – not hot – water,<sup>15</sup> using a non-soap cleanser or mild soap that's suitable for atopic dermatitis.<sup>41</sup> You can gently remove any scabs with a wet cloth while soaking in the bath.<sup>42</sup>



### Moisturising

A good moisturising routine will help prevent your skin from becoming dry and may even reduce the risk of flare ups.<sup>43</sup> Moisturise generously once or twice a day, especially after bathing,<sup>44</sup> using a moisturiser free from additives, fragrances, and perfumes.<sup>45</sup> You may prefer using thicker creams or ointments at night, as they can be too greasy for daytime.<sup>46</sup>



### Clothing

Some fabrics, such as wool, can be irritating to the skin,<sup>15</sup> while others, such as natural fabrics, can play a protective role. To stay warm in colder climates, try dressing in layers, with natural fibres – such as cotton and silk – closest to your skin.<sup>37</sup>



### Using humidifiers

Using an indoor humidifier may help prevent your skin from drying out.<sup>30</sup>

## Hot and humid environments

Many people find that a warmer climate and regular exposure to sunlight improves their symptoms.<sup>30,47</sup> However, while combined exposure to sunshine and warmer temperatures can have positive effects,<sup>47</sup> heat and humidity also bring challenges.

### What makes it worse?

In warmer and more humid climates, you are likely to sweat more, which can trigger or worsen atopic dermatitis.<sup>30,47</sup>



## Skincare for hot climates



### Cleansing

It's important to maintain a good bathing routine in the summer months to help keep sweat, allergens, and other irritants from aggravating your atopic dermatitis.<sup>48</sup> Bathe or shower daily in warm water with a mild soap.<sup>41</sup> Between baths, wiping away excess sweat with a wet cloth can help prevent it from worsening your atopic dermatitis.<sup>49</sup>



### Moisturising

Cold moisturiser can help reduce itching quickly, so you may want to try storing your moisturiser in the refrigerator.<sup>50</sup>



### Clothing

Choose light clothing that lets your skin breathe. This can help keep you cooler, which means less sweat.<sup>30</sup> If your clothes do become damp from perspiration, change into dry clothes as soon as you can.<sup>51</sup>



### Sun protection

Avoid sunburn by staying out of the sun, wearing protective clothing, and using sunscreen.<sup>52</sup> When choosing a sunscreen, look for unfragranced formulas with moisturising ingredients that have a protective factor of at least SPF 30.<sup>53,54</sup>

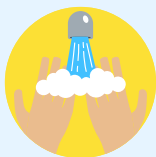
# Beauty, Skincare, and Atopic Dermatitis

## Skincare tips for feeling your best with atopic dermatitis



### Getting the basics right

Everyone should have the chance to pamper themselves and feel their best. But if you have atopic dermatitis (eczema), there are certain skincare products that can irritate your skin.<sup>55</sup> That's why it's helpful to know which ingredients to look for and which to avoid, and what should form the basis of a good skincare routine.



#### Cleansing

Cleansing is an essential part of a good skin care routine for atopic dermatitis.<sup>37</sup> Try bathing or showering in lukewarm water with a non-soap cleanser or synthetic detergent,<sup>37,41</sup> then gently pat the skin dry instead of rubbing.<sup>57</sup>



#### Makeup

Some kinds of makeup can irritate the skin. Avoid using irritating products on any skin where you're experiencing atopic dermatitis. You may find that mineral makeup bothers your skin less.<sup>59</sup>

Remove make-up with emollient on a damp cotton pad - this is just as effective as cosmetic makeup remover products and gentler on your skin.<sup>59</sup>



#### Moisturisers

Moisturisers can improve the skin barrier (which is impaired by atopic dermatitis), help reduce the frequency and severity of flares,<sup>43,58</sup> and help smooth the surface of the skin by getting rid of old skin cells.<sup>37</sup>

Apply plenty of moisturiser at least once a day, preferably twice.<sup>58</sup> Apply after bathing for the best results.<sup>44</sup> Moisturisers come in many forms, from oils and ointments to lotions and gels.<sup>58</sup> Try to find a product you like, as you'll be much more likely to use it.<sup>58</sup>



#### Nail care

If you have brittle nails, use a moisturiser regularly to keep your nails hydrated. A nail hardener may also help but stop using it if your nails begin to split.<sup>60</sup>

Keeping your fingernails short and smooth can help prevent you from accidentally damaging your skin.<sup>57</sup>



### Hair care

Choose a shampoo specifically designed for atopic dermatitis<sup>57</sup> or one that doesn't contain irritating ingredients. Because your hair touches your skin, it's also important to fully rinse out any hair products to prevent skin irritation.<sup>61</sup>



### Shaving

Dry shaving using an electric razor or a hair/beard trimmer set to low is less likely to nick your skin. When wet shaving, moisturisers can be used as a shaving cream. Use a sharp razor, shave in the direction of hair growth, and apply moisturiser afterwards to soothe the skin.<sup>62</sup>



### Humidifiers

Using an indoor humidifier may help prevent your skin from drying out.<sup>30</sup>



### Deodorants and antiperspirants

Many deodorants and antiperspirants contain irritating ingredients – most commonly, fragrances, propylene glycol, essential oils and other biological additives.<sup>63</sup> Avoid antiperspirants containing aluminium salts, and you may want to try alcohol- and fragrance-free products<sup>64</sup> or a crystal deodorant.<sup>63,65</sup>



### Self-patch testing

Skincare products start affecting your skin from the first week of use, and some ingredients can remain on your skin for several weeks,<sup>66</sup> so it's a good idea to be cautious when using new products. You may want to do a self-patch test before using a new product - apply a small amount of product to a patch of skin twice daily for 7-10 days and watch for a reaction.<sup>67</sup> If you experience a reaction, stop using the product and consult your doctor.



### Ingredients that could be harmful

Ingredients to watch for when buying or trying something new include:

- **Fragrances** - Fragrances added to skincare products can cause reactions.<sup>55</sup>
- **Preservatives** - These are added to cosmetic products to make them last longer, but they can also trigger atopic dermatitis. They include parabens, isothiazolinones, formaldehyde, iodopropynyl, butylcarbamate, and methyl dibromo glutaronitrile.<sup>55</sup>
- **PPD (paraphenylenediamine)** - PPD is found in some hair and nail care products, including permanent wave solutions and hair dyes, artificial nails and nail polishes, and temporary skin tattoos.<sup>55</sup>

If you suspect that any product is making your skin worse, stop using it. Then reintroduce products one at a time to see if you can work out which is causing the problem.<sup>59</sup>

Remember, your healthcare team are here to support you in living your best life with atopic dermatitis. Always follow your doctor's advice.

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