

Southside Dermatology

Soak and Smear Patient Educational Instruction Sheet

Eczema is a chronic condition of the skin that can cause itchiness and redness. Patients with eczema have sensitive skin, more sensitive than normal skin. Sensitive skin is more easily irritated (which causes the itchiness) by dryness and irritants in the environment (such as wool in clothing or chemicals in lotions). Eczema can be controlled with good skin care and environmental measures (avoiding things that irritate your skin).

SOAKING AND SMEARING

This is an aggressive treatment that is both messy (find an old pair of pajamas or cotton gloves for the hands) and time intensive. This regimen may use a medication you have used before without success. But this medicine is being used in a different way as part of an intensive treatment regimen that must be followed exactly to work. This treatment can lead to marked improvement in even a couple of days. The number of nights of soaking and smearing depends on the severity of the disease and how long it takes to get under control. Usually patients do the soaking and smearing treatments at night for 2 to 4 weeks. The soaking and smearing treatments are done at night because the ointment on your skin will get on your pajamas instead of your clothes (that you wear during the daytime) and the ointment will be on your skin for several hours while you sleep. After the skin is under control, the soaking is stopped but the nighttime smears with an ointment or moisturizer should continue.

INSTRUCTIONS

Soak in a-bath (not a shower) in plain water for 20 minutes at night, THEN smear immediately, without drying the skin with the ointment containing _____ (steroid), THEN put on old pajamas. Repeat this for _____ days. For hand dryness and cracking, soak your hands continuously in a pan of water for 20 minutes at night and follow with the smearing as above. Then put on cotton gloves. After the skin is under control the soaks at night can be stopped. But continue to smear the ointment each night. Throughout the treatment period you can apply _____ cream to the worst areas in the morning. The soaking will allow the water to go into the skin and hydrate it, and smearing on the ointment will (1) trap the water in the skin (because water cannot move through the oil), moisturizing it, and (2) allow the anti-inflammatory ingredient in the ointment to get deep into the skin.

MAINTENANCE TREATMENT PREVENT DRYING/IRRITATION

Repeated wetting (ie, baths, showers,swimming) without moisturization will actually dry out the skin more. So when showering or washing your hands, it is necessary to apply a moisturizer such as CeraVe or Cetaphil on your slightly moist skin to prevent drying. These less thick moisturizers may be used during the daytime. With petroleum jelly always available for more intense moisturization at night.

SOAP

Using soap in the shower can further dry out the skin by removing the oils the skin naturally produces. Limiting the use of soap to armpits and groin can allow you to be sufficiently clean while reducing dryness. Always apply a moisturizing cream (rather than lotion) to moist skin (barely put dry) after getting out of the shower.