

# eaa

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support education management

1300 300 182

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# atopic eczema

## PRE-SCHOOL - YEAR 2



**An Activity Pack For Schools**

# Atopic Eczema

## An Activity Pack for Schools

Understanding the impact of atopic eczema on a child is vital. This pack presents a variety of guidelines, articles and exercises designed to engage children of all ages and illustrate that what might appear to be 'just dry skin' is, in fact, a debilitating condition that needs continual treatment.

Children with atopic eczema can suffer from tiredness, loss of concentration and an inability to join in regular school activities. They may also find themselves ostracised by other children, even bullied. It is therefore vital that everyone understands this condition, particularly as it now affects as many as one in five children of school age.

For additional copies of this pack please call **1300 300 182**  
or download from our website [www.eczema.org.au](http://www.eczema.org.au).



# Atopic Eczema

## Activity Pack for Teachers

### CONTENTS

Activity	Title
Teacher Guidelines	
Circle Time Session	Circle Time Session
Draw a picture	Draw a picture of an itch
Puzzles	Choose the right length of bandages
Puzzles	What should you be careful about in this picture?
Puzzles	Word Square
Puzzles	A maze
Story Time	Scaly Snake, Spotted Dog and Itchy Engine
Reprinted article for Children to take home	Starting school with eczema
Reprinted article	Imagine you have an itch - an adult perspective
Teacher Feedback Sheets	Record Your Comments & Suggestions



## Teacher Guidelines

Notes for Teachers outlining common issues for children with atopic eczema. Further information can be found on the Eczema Association's website [www.eczema.org.au](http://www.eczema.org.au)

These notes are intended to help provide a basic framework for teachers to use either in assembly or in a lesson.



## WHAT IS ECZEMA?

Eczema is a skin condition which comes in many forms and varies from person to person. For some it is a relatively mild condition. For others it is truly debilitating and impacts significantly on their quality of life.

Atopic eczema is the most common form. We still do not know exactly why atopic eczema develops in some people. Research shows a combination of factors play a part including genetics (hereditary) and the environment. Atopic eczema can flare up and then calm down for a time, but the skin tends to remain dry and itchy between flare ups. The skin is dry and reddened and may be very itchy, scaly and cracked. The itchiness of eczema can be unbearable, leading to sleep loss, frustration, poor concentration, stress and depression.

There is currently no cure for eczema but the condition can be managed successfully.

**Most students will be aware of eczema.  
However, there are a number of MISCONCEPTIONS that persist.**

- It is NOT just a bit of itchy dry skin that babies get
- Eczema is NOT caused by bad personal hygiene. People with eczema are NOT dirty.
- It is NOT contagious. You can't catch eczema by touching someone who has it.

**It is essential that these misconceptions are dispelled.**

## WHAT DOES ECZEMA FEEL LIKE?

It can be difficult to imagine how eczema can be so awful. It is characterised by an intense itching, often accompanied by red, hot, broken and even bleeding skin. You can compare it to:

- A mosquito bite
- Itching powder
- Nettle rash
- Chicken pox
- Any other itching experience students may be familiar with: Was it sore? Did it itch? Could they sleep?

The other thing to emphasise is that this itching DOESN'T STOP. Day or night, every day, every night, that itching is there. Just imagine....

Above all else, there is an INTENSE NEED TO SCRATCH.



The irony is, of course, that scratching for relief invariably makes the condition worse and so the need to scratch intensifies. This is called the ITCH/SCRATCH CYCLE: you itch so you scratch which causes more itching which means more scratching.

## SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH SCRATCHING

Scratching feels good, that's why you do it, but it can cause bleeding, which can leave the skin open to infection.

Adults, in particular, tend to tell children with eczema to stop scratching when they actually feel great relief from doing so. Adults make smart 'adult type comments' like "you will make it bleed," when it is probably already bleeding. The students will relate to this! A better approach is to try to divert the student's attention.

## ECZEMA IS NOT CONTAGIOUS

The other vital element is to emphasise that ECZEMA IS NOT CONTAGIOUS

How to get this point over? You could start by discussing skin conditions which are infectious such as chickenpox or measles. Then explain that although eczema might look a bit similar, it is in fact completely different. Eczema is not a disease you catch but something you are prone to, either because you inherit it and/or because you react in this way to something in the environment.

You might like to ask the class if they have other conditions which other people don't catch, such as asthma or things to which they are allergic. For younger children, show that holding hands with a child with eczema holds no worries.

## WHO GETS ECZEMA?

**It is hereditary:** you will either have it or you won't and there is nothing you can do about your predisposition to the condition.

Children with brothers and sisters, parents or grandparents with eczema, asthma or hay fever are most likely to have the condition.

**Up to one in five children will suffer from eczema.** This means that in a class of thirty, on average, there will be six pupils with the condition.



## COMMON PROBLEMS

In fact, children with eczema need special friends, as they have lots of horrid things to put up with. The following are just some examples of the problems experienced by children with eczema:

- Dealing with allergies and irritants eg pets, dust, pollen, certain soaps and washing powders
- Food allergies can create problems with school lunches and the school tuckshop having to monitor carefully what the child eats
- Needing to use a special cleaner rather than the school soap, they may also need to use cotton towels as paper towels can cause problems
- Changes in temperature can exacerbate the condition, getting too hot (sitting by a sunny window) or too cold (during PE in the playground)
- Wearing woolly jumpers, school uniforms (especially if they are not cotton) and sport uniforms can all exacerbate eczema
- Applying creams at school, a need for extra time and privacy
- Needing to wear bandages or cotton gloves to protect their skin
- If the eczema cracks they may not be able to hold a pen
- Eczema may become so bad that the child is in pain or need to miss school, due to a lack of sleep, pain or hospital visits
- Sleep problems are very common. A nice warm cosy bed can lead to itching and therefore lack of sleep. Grumpiness and lack of concentration can result due to tiredness.

## WHAT CAN STUDENTS DO?

Most importantly, **UNDERSTAND**

Eczema is not funny,

it's not catching,

it's not self-inflicted.

They should try to help because people who have eczema need friends to help them manage their condition.



**ACTIVITY TITLE - CIRCLE TIME SESSION  
I'VE GOT AN ITCH**

## Circle Time

**What follows is the outline of a suggested script for a member of staff to use with children in the early years of schooling. There are a series of questions and suggested prompts to help the children understand this condition.**

**1. What does the word eczema mean?**

Explain that it is a Greek word. Ask does it mean: to itch, to boil, to burn or to peel? It actually means to boil and this is very relevant as people with eczema say their skin feels very hot.

**2. Why do people get eczema?**

Offer the following suggestions:

It runs in the family - for example, a close relative has eczema, asthma or hay fever  
They catch it from someone else  
They are an ATOPIC person  
They are allergic to certain things

All but the 'catch it' option are true - please emphasise to the children that eczema is NOT contagious. You can liken eczema to sunburn, which is also a condition of the skin, a child will understand that they cannot catch sunburn from another person.

**3. What does ATOPIC mean?**

We would like children to understand the word 'Atopic', make the following suggestions:

A project for school  
Someone who is atopic may be more likely to develop allergies  
Someone who may also have asthma or hay fever

During the discussions, point out that someone who is atopic will produce a 'reaction' to something which is otherwise harmless. For example: feathers, cats, dogs or pollen can cause someone who is atopic to produce a reaction. They may sneeze, get watery eyes, wheeze or itch. Someone who is not atopic will not react in these circumstances.

**4. What is an allergy?**

The following are suggestions which will hopefully lead the children to the correct conclusion:

A breakfast cereal  
Your body's dislike of some of the things that you eat, touch or breathe in  
A small alligator  
A bad cold

As with the previous question, someone who is atopic will produce an allergic reaction and therefore an allergy is your body's dislike of something, which you touch, eat or breathe in. Examples being if you touch an animal you may itch; if you are allergic to nuts and you eat one you may have an anaphylactic reaction; if you breathe in pollen you may sneeze or develop an asthma type reaction.





**ACTIVITY TITLE - CIRCLE TIME SESSION  
I'VE GOT AN ITCH**

## Circle Time

The object of the next few questions is to understand the difference between different atopic conditions.

**5. How do you know if you have asthma?**

- a) You get spots
- b) You cough
- c) You wheeze

People with asthma will wheeze, but they might have a night time cough as well.

**6. How do you know if you have eczema?**

- a) You wheeze
- b) You get a rash
- c) You itch

Eczema produces a rash or raised areas, and it itches!

**7. How do you know if you have hay fever?**

- a) You have itchy skin
- b) You sneeze
- c) You have sore itchy eyes

Hay fever makes you sneeze and/or have sore itchy eyes, but will not give you itchy skin.

### The next section looks at things which can affect eczema

**8. What sort of things can make eczema worse?**

This is an opportunity to highlight situations and items which may exacerbate the skin - illustrating what a fickle condition it is, as the children will soon realise that some things can make eczema better or worse! For example, hot sunny places!

Ideas which may exacerbate eczema are:

- Cold weather
- Alligator
- Woolly sweaters
- Worrying
- Sport Uniforms
- Hot sunny places
- Soap powder

Only alligators are in the clear - unless, of course, you come face to face with one on the loose which may cause considerable stress, and stress can make you itch.



**ACTIVITY TITLE - CIRCLE TIME SESSION  
I'VE GOT AN ITCH**

## Circle Time

**9. What sort of thing can make eczema better?**

**At this point, it is interesting to discuss the fact that some of the same things and situations come up as in previous questions AND what suits one person's needs may not suit another's.**

**Ideas 'to make it better'**

Happy feelings  
Sunshine  
Cotton clothes  
Creams and baths  
Relaxing and chilling out  
Cold weather

A discussion point would be that for some people sunshine makes their eczema worse and for some people it will improve their condition. The same applies to cold weather.

Also, some individuals will find that sometimes their eczema improves in the sun and sometimes their eczema gets worse with the sun - a nightmare!

**Key Learning Points**

Eczema is not contagious  
The meaning of Atopic  
The meaning of Allergy  
Causes of eczema  
Relationship of eczema, hay fever and asthma



**ACTIVITY TITLE - DRAW A PICTURE  
HOW DOES IT FEEL?**

## Draw a picture of an itch

Imagine you have eczema - and **DRAW A PICTURE.**

There are lots of things you can draw, but they should all have to do with the terrible itching of eczema.

For example, you could:

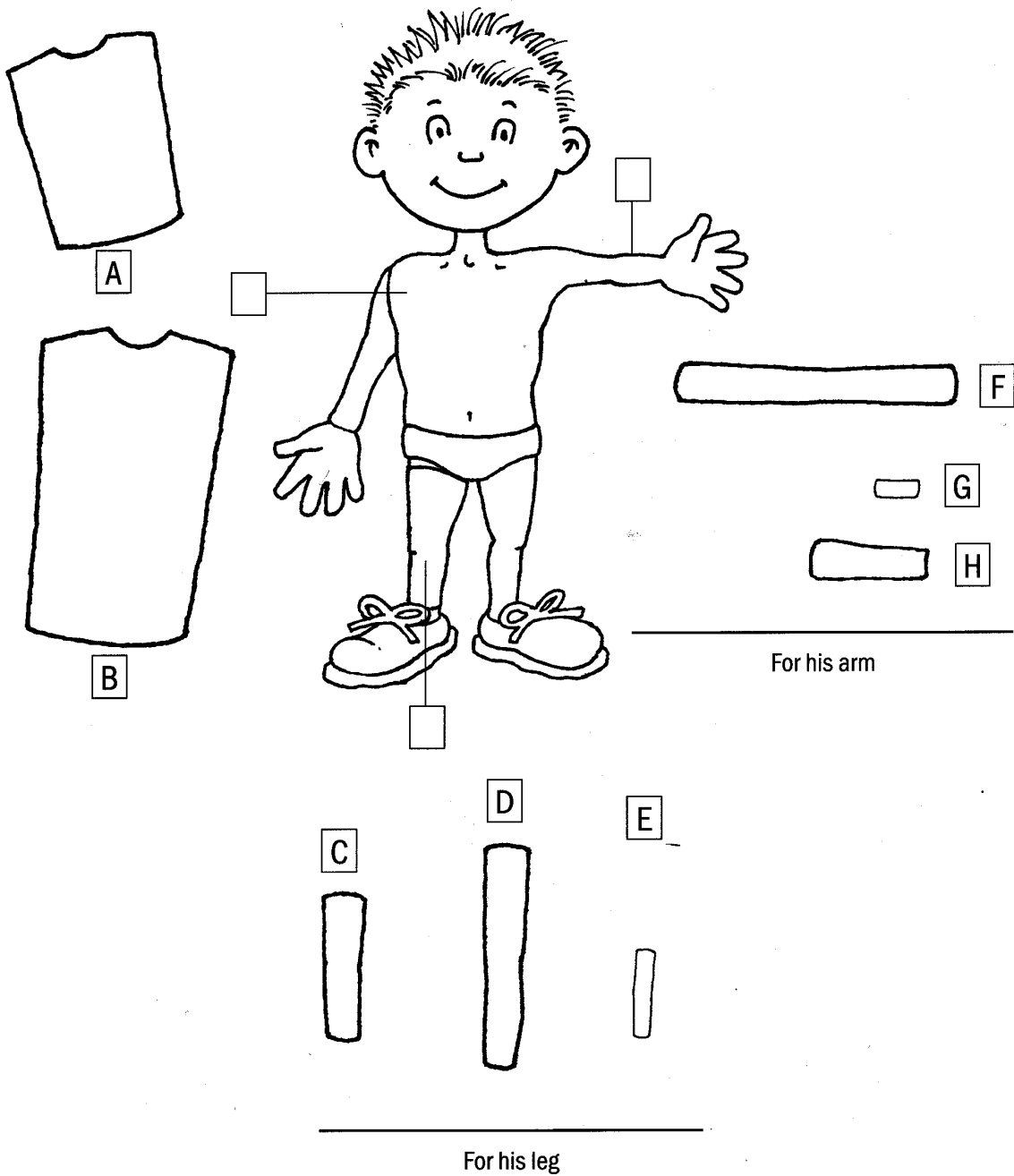
- **Draw an itch**  
What does an itch look like? Would a really bad itch be spiky, red, hot and cross perhaps?
- **Can you draw someone with very itchy eczema?**  
How do you think they would feel?
- **Can you draw the same person after they have applied their creams?**  
They will now be feeling cool and calm. No more nasty itch!
- **Here's a drawing by 6-year-old John of how he thinks eczema would feel**  
"My skin would be all red and itchy and make me cry. I would not play with friends in case I got hot. My skin would be all red. I might bleed. I would stay awake at night scratching. Even flowers could make me worse"



**ACTIVITY TITLE - PUZZLES  
SORTING OUT THE BANDAGES**

**Choose the right length of bandages**

Using the picture of Thomas, match the correct size of wet wrap bandage to Thomas's arm, leg and body. Ask a grown up to help you cut out the bandages and put them on Thomas.



**ACTIVITY TITLE - PUZZLES**  
**WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS ROOM**

**What should you be careful about in this picture?**

See how many things you can see that could cause problems for someone who has atopic eczema. When you've finished, why not have some fun and colour it in?



## Answers

- People who have eczema have to be careful about things which can make their eczema worse such as pet hair (the dog) and pollen (the flowers)
- The rug may also retain dust mites and pet fleas, which can trigger eczema or make it worse
- They can also be allergic to certain foods, such as wheat or dairy products (the sandwiches)
- Extreme temperatures can aggravate eczema (the fireplace)
- Clothing can also cause problems (the woolly jumper and the sports uniform). Loose cotton clothing is best
- Energetic activity can cause sweating, which can make eczema worse (the sports uniform again)



ACTIVITY TITLE - WORD SEARCH  
FIND THE WORDS

**Word Square**

In this square there are a number of words that are about eczema. These words can run up and down and diagonally. Look carefully at the list of words and tick them off every time you find one.

- |                                 |                               |                                  |                                 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> cool   | <input type="checkbox"/> wash | <input type="checkbox"/> water   | <input type="checkbox"/> rash   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> soothe | <input type="checkbox"/> itch | <input type="checkbox"/> soap    | <input type="checkbox"/> eczema |
| <input type="checkbox"/> raw    | <input type="checkbox"/> pain | <input type="checkbox"/> scratch |                                 |

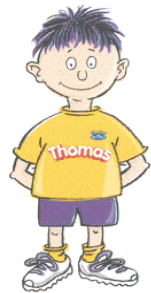
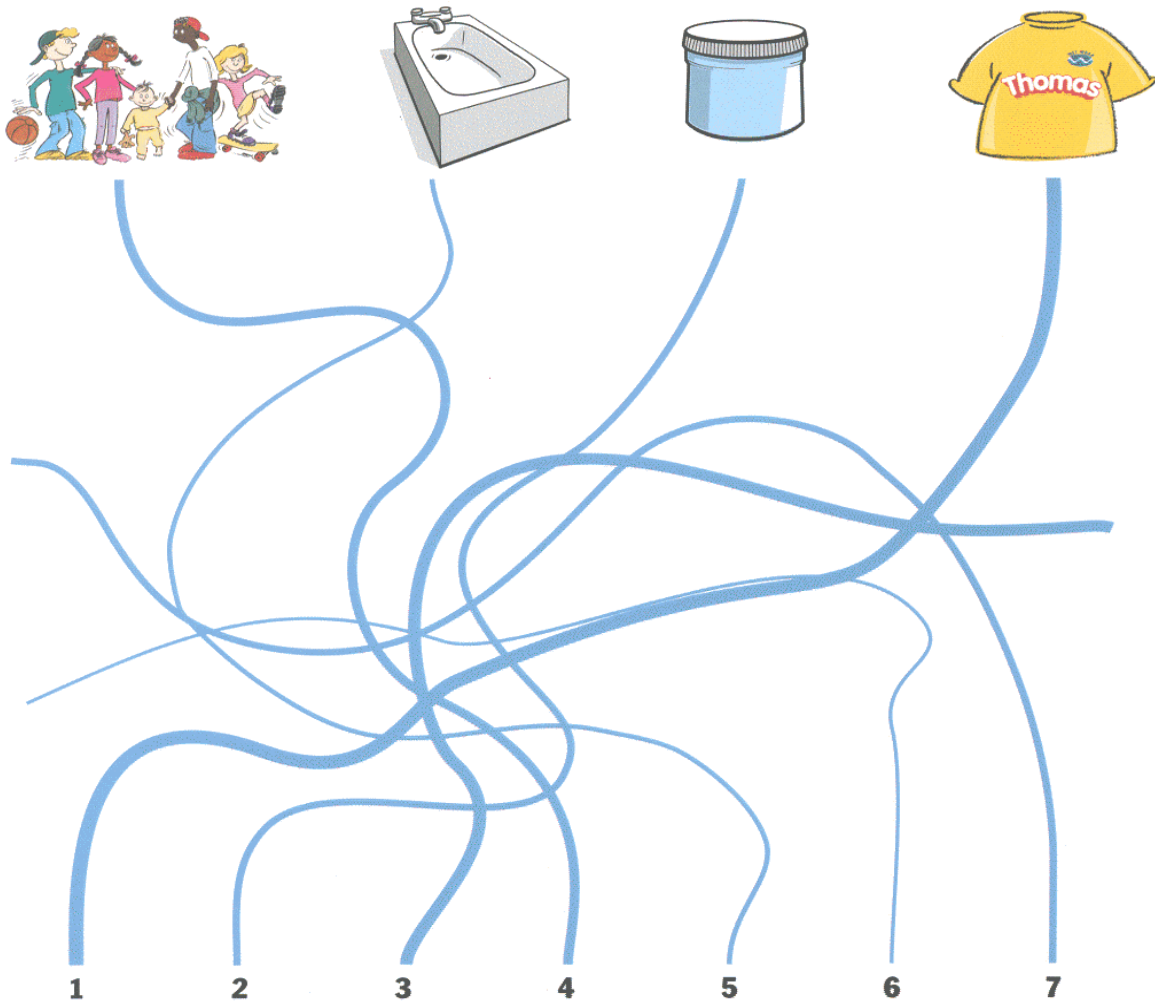
w	e	a	w	r	b	p	h
a	c	h	a	a	k	a	c
s	z	u	t	w	z	i	t
h	e	m	e	p	t	n	a
b	m	k	r	c	a	f	r
r	a	s	h	l	o	o	c
s	o	o	t	h	e	x	s



**ACTIVITY TITLE - PUZZLES**  
**HELP THOMAS FIND HIS WET WRAPS**

**A Maze**

Help Thomas find his friends or what he needs to relieve his itching - eg bath, emollient (special cream), cotton clothes.





## Eczema School Care Kit

You can make eczema less of an issue — and make school easier — by putting together a kit with everything your child may need during the school day.

The following list is just a suggestion; feel free to add or remove items to suit your child's particular needs.

- ◆ Gloves (for handling materials that may irritate skin)
- ◆ Moisturizing cream or lotion
- ◆ Soap-free cleanser
- ◆ Spare bandages
- ◆ Protective clothing
- ◆ Written instructions on medications your child may be taking at school, triggers to avoid, limitations or special precautions on activities such as sports.



ACTIVITY TITLE - STORY TIME  
THOMAS AND THE HAPPY WRAPPERS

## Scaly Snake, Spotted Dog and Itchy Engine

This is the story of Scaly Snake, Spotted Dog and Itchy Engine, who all lived in Nesland.

Scaly Snake had a problem with his skin. Instead of peeling off once a year like other snakes' skin - his seemed to want to peel off all the time.

So he kept leaving bits here and bits there. He wriggled so much, he wore himself out.

Spotted Dog also had a problem with his skin. Spots came up in one place one day, and in another place the next!

Even when he was a puppy, he was different from all his brothers and sisters. But it was all right because his mother had been just the same.

The trouble was he scratched a lot, so he was given soothing baths with special shampoo nearly every day. But how he longed not to have itchy spots!

Itchy Engine also had a problem. It didn't matter how many times he was given a new coat of paint, it always bubbled up into blisters, and then turned into rusty patches. It made him feel really uncomfortable. On bad days he would rush about the countryside on his railway track, going:

ITCHY...ITCHY...ITCHY...ITCHY...ITCHY...  
ITCHYITCHYITCHYITCHYITCHYITCHYITCHYITCHY...

That's how he got his name!

But he knew once a year he had a very special job to do, and this made him feel happy and important.

When the time arrived, the news travelled fast. The birds twittered it. The leaves in the trees whispered it. The wind carried the message to all the corners of Nesland...

'THE GRANDEK ZEMA EXPECTS YOU! THE GRANDEK ZEMA EXPECTS YOU!'

The Grandek Zema was a wizard who lived in a big glass castle in the North of Nesland. He too, always had trouble with his skin. But being interested in magic ointments and medicines, he set about helping others as well.

As a young wizard he was just called Zema. But whenever he made a new ointment, his friends would say "Eee, by 'eck, Zema - that's grand!" That's how he got his name.

So Itchy Engine's job was to collect everyone with a skin problem and take them on his train to see the Grandek Zema.



Spotted dog and Scaly Snake heard the message and couldn't wait for the day to arrive. They were so excited! And so surprised when the train came to see lots of others going too.

There was a spotted horse, who said she spent much of her time rolling over and over. There was an elephant, who said he had to stand in a pool all day throwing water over his back to keep his skin wet. AND THERE WERE LOTS OF BOYS AND GIRLS just like you!

The journey passed quickly with so much to talk about and soon the glass castle came into sight. Through the walls they could see bubblings and mixings, shelves and shelves of jars and bottles, and posts and pots of creams to make their skin better.

The Grandek Zema listed to everyone in turn. He gave each of them a special pot of ointment to take home and a new pair of cotton mittens for the children and Spotted Dog.

Itchy Engine blew his whistle when it was time to leave and the Grandek Zema called everyone together for 'Question Time'. HIS questions, of course! This happened every year and some of them knew the answers already.

"What's better than doing nothing?"

"Keeping busy!" said Spotted Dog, wagging his tail very fast.

"What's better than being cross?"

"Keeping calm!" said the elephant, swinging his trunk slowly from side to side.

"What's better than worrying?"

"Sharing your problems!" said a smiling girl in a bright cotton dress.

"What's better than scratching?"

"NOT SCRATCHING!" they all shouted together, and laughed.

"Or rubbing instead," the Grandek Zema reminded them, because he knew how hard it was not to scratch.

"So, will you promise to try hard?" he said, finally.

"WE PROMISE!" they said. All, but one...

Scaly Snake had creamed himself all over with new ointment and curled up for a nap.

"I promisssssss...sss...ss..." he said sleepily, without a single wriggle.

Then Itchy Engine took them all home... until the next time.

If YOU will promise too, just before you go to sleep, The Grandek Zema will be listening!



## starting school with eczema

**Settling in can be particularly daunting if your child has eczema. Jane Morgan offers some practical advice**

Perhaps the biggest wrench of the parent or carer of a child with eczema is passing on the care of that child to the 'big school'. It is something that we all have to endure and this is an attempt to make that transition from home or daycare to school as easy as possible. Due to the very nature of the condition eczema can vary in its severity from a small patch of dry skin to extreme cases that require regular hospital admissions. 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. However, they can be instrumental in making sure that you maintain your child's skin in the best condition possible and ensure that their skin does not deteriorate unnecessarily.

### A step-by-step approach

**Approach your child's new class teacher** and ask for a meeting/interview/coffee and a chat - depending on the type of person they are. Try to fit in as best you can with their busy schedule - most teachers like to see parents immediately after school, or when (and if) they have a free lesson. You may need to take time off work, but this appointment is as important as any doctor, dentist or hospital appointment you may ever have - it is about your child's well being as they start school.

Make sure that they are aware that you will need about 20 minutes of their time (longer if necessary) and then right from the start they know there is a lot to cover.

**Prepare for the meeting.** Your class teacher's experience of eczema may range from an acquaintance's baby having a bit of eczema, and therefore wondering why you need to speak to them, through to having already dealt with a child with severe eczema. I would assume that their experience is the former and expect no knowledge, as everyone's eczema is different and this will be their first experience of your child.

**Make a list** of the things that you need to mention.

Your list should include:

- **Your child's normal routine** - emphasise 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. Many teachers (myself included when I was teaching) are unaware that children with eczema are often regular hospital admissions.
- **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, sitting on a plastic chair for long periods, cooking with foods that your child is allergic to, tasting foods as part of the Curriculum, and helping with the school pets.

**Make friends with the teacher** during your meeting. You will probably need to make regular contact with them during the time your child is in their class, so it is important to build a mutually understanding relationship.

Make sure that the time you have picked is appropriate and they have plenty of time for you to explain - this is **important** and you must not be made to feel rushed.

Carefully go through the salient points, at the same time emphasizing that there are strategies we can use to overcome most of the difficulties.

The main aim is to make sure that your child is not made to feel different from the other children by 'missing out', at the same time ensuring that their eczema is not exacerbated by misunderstandings. 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.

**Reassure your child** that starting school is fun, and play down any reservations you may have about the class teacher's ability to cope with your child. It is natural for you to worry but essential that your child is **unaware** of your fears. It will be impossible for your child to receive the one-to-one attention that you have given them until now but, by working as a team with the teacher and classroom assistants, together you should be able to make your child's time in school a happy time.

### Examinations and assessments

As your child progresses, pre-empt possible problems with tests, examinations and assessments. Explain that eczema can be aggravated by stress. Establish what special dispensations may be available to children with medical conditions, for example:

- Up to 25% extra time for students with writing difficulties (if they have hand eczema);
- Permission to record answers on a tape;
- Provision of an amanuensis (someone to write down answers under the student's instruction);
- Rearrangement of dates and times;
- 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.

### Appropriate support

Most children can cope well in mainstream school by paying special attention to their physical comfort and well-being. A child is only regarded as having 'medical needs' if their condition limits their access to education. Most children with eczema should not reach this stage.

However, please note that there is no legal or contractual duty on staff to administer medication. There may be a member of the support staff who has specific duties to provide medical assistance as part of their contract.

Whatever arrangements 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.

**Just one more point - be prepared to explain it all over again whenever your child gets a new teacher!**

### Practical guidelines for positive action

- Pump action dispensers for emollients are easier, more hygienic and less 'messy' for use in a class room.
- Seek out small sizes of soap substitutes and emollients for your child to have in their bag.
- Teach your child the basics:
  - Putting the cream on in the direction of the hair growth
  - Clean hands are essential to put cream on
  - The difference between steroid and emollient - for example, the emollient can be applied as often as you want to and the steroid is restricted. Colour-code their tubes if necessary - green for go (emollient), amber for think about it (steroid)
- Keep cool, avoiding radiators and sunny windows
- Sit on a chair rather than the carpet.
- Wear loose cotton clothes where possible.
- Put a cotton cloth or towel over plastic chairs before sitting.
- Have a small cotton towel (named) in school with a loop on to hang it up.
- Use not-irritant gloves to protect the hands during Art, Pottery, and Food Technology.
- Allow the child to watch, rather than handle chemicals, in Science.
- Excuse from "washing up" in Technology subjects.
- Be aware of the problems caused by temperature changes in PE lessons and allow either long-sleeved kit or being excused in extremes of temperature.
- Allow plenty of time for the student to use emollients after and during showers (if appropriate).
- 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.

*It is not the policy of the  
**ECZEMA ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALASIA INC**  
to recommend or endorse any product or  
treatment. It is part of the role of the Association  
to provide information on a wide range of  
products and treatments to keep those involved  
with eczema as fully informed as possible as to  
all options available.*

## imagine you have an itch

### ECZEMA - the experience

By Susanne Johns

The next time you have an itch - anywhere on your body - just try not to scratch.

Leave it for as long as you possibly can and when you finally give in, notice the feeling of sheer relief.

Imagine a similar sensation, but this time it's all over your body. You can't pinpoint an area that doesn't itch. But the itching is far more intense now and actually feels like a million tiny creatures running around just under the surface of your skin.

#### Now try not to scratch!

**Eczema affects approximately one in 12 adults.**

Every day, like me, they experience the torment of being torn between scratching the skin to get rid of the terrible, deep rooted itch and the resulting pain, inflammation and bleeding from the damage of your own nails.

At 24, I am now experiencing the full-blown emotional and physical effects of eczema. It started at the age of 14 and apart from the odd few months of relief here and there, it has got progressively worse.

After 10 years, I am also fully aware of the side effects and dangers of steroid creams - repeatedly prescribed for me by doctors who seem to take very little interest in my condition. Unfortunately their side effects make me feel like I'm doing more damage in the long run.

Usually within a few hours of using steroid cream my skin will begin to calm down. Only slightly but enough to take the edge off my panic. It seems like the only form of relief and yet people tell me not to use it.

**"You must try not to use those chemical creams - all they do is push the eczema back under the surface". "They'll make it worse in the long run. Imagine having skin like an old woman by the time you're 40". "I've seen people whose skin has torn like paper after years of using steroid creams".**

In my case, a severe flare-up may be caused by worry, stress, contact with animals or sometimes just for the sheer hell of it. It starts in the more common places - behind the knees, elbows, creases in the arms.

Then it starts to spread. Ankles, calves, thighs, buttocks, trunk, chest, neck, face, forehead, hair-line and ears.

And the times I've been told not to scratch. "Don't do that, it looks terrible". "Stop it, you're making me itch". "Can't you just leave it - sit on your hands". "Scratch around it - try to relax". Relax? When your body's on fire. When your skin is actually weeping because you've scratched away so many layers. The extremes of temperature usually make me shake and shiver because I'm losing so much body heat through the inflammation.

#### Can you imagine relaxing?

It's as if my body is tormenting itself. How can it continue to itch when it's so sore? "Go on, make it worse, just one little scratch and it'll feel much better" it seems to say.

Trouble is, one little scratch usually materialises into a frenzied clawing which spreads across my entire body until I'm exhausted, sore and feel a complete failure for giving in.

**I get scared during flare-ups because I realise I'm losing control. I can't stop myself from scratching and all of a sudden I realise that with my own bare hands, I am actually mutilating myself. Imagine the horror of scratching the back of your knees, feeling it getting wet beneath your fingers as you draw blood but you just can't stop...**

Clawing as deep as possible into your chest to find you've gouged away chunks of skin leaving holes and trails where your nails have torn through the once delicate skin...

Standing up after sitting down only to find you can't straighten your legs because the skin has dried up and will split if you force it. Living with the lingering smell as your body weeps from the sores. Realising you can't possibly look attractive to your partner and feeling guilty because the physical side of your relationship is just too painful or uncomfortable to cope with.

#### Of course the relentless itching doesn't stop at night

Sometimes it is even worse as the warmth of my body is contained in the sheets. Even the weight of the bedding can irritate as it rests on my skin. The nights of constant scratching, leaning out to smear moisturising cream to ease the skin that after just 15 minutes has dried out again takes its toll on everyday life leaving me tired, irritable and even less able to fight the resulting depression. If I am particularly stressed or having a severe flare up, I am plagued by fitful



dreams that appear designed to make me scratch.

**I remember dreaming once that my body was a map of the world and each part of me a different country. By scratching certain areas like my legs, I felt I was actually helping the poor people of that country. Somehow my mind was making me scratch subconsciously through my sleep.**

I once overheard someone say I was feeling sorry for myself and wasn't being positive enough to overcome the problem, and sometimes I feel family and friends must get bored when they ask how my skin is, only to be met with the same old story of sleepless nights, bad dreams and 'sore bits'.

I've even been told I'm lucky to have arms and legs - there are plenty of people who don't have the use of their limbs.

I know, and it makes me feel terrible to be moaning, but it doesn't stop the itch, the pain or the distress.

Some mornings I actually don't want to get out of bed because I'm so sore and I know moving is going to hurt, so I'd rather stay tucked up, lying still and cocooned in my quilt rather than have to face a day-long routine of bathing, putting on cream and facing the world and the stares of people who wonder what's wrong.

Parts of my skin are now toughening up after years of 'nail abuse'. There are areas on my arms and legs which don't tan in the summer because of the scar tissue, and I'm left with two-tone blotches like a patchwork quilt.

The skin around my wrists and ankles has become wizened and thin after years of using steroid creams and the skin around my chest looks like cellophane when pressed.

I know I must sound full of self pity - but I have at last found a way of expressing my feelings in one go with nobody talking back to me.

**People must understand the reality of eczema, but because it's not life threatening it's something many people turn a blind eye to. We need more support from the Commonwealth Health Services, from our GP's and other medical professionals. People in the medical profession need educating to improve their understanding of the condition.**

A couple of years ago my skin was inflamed, cracked and weeping and a doctor told me to make it look worse by scratching it harder to justify getting me a hospital bed.

***Hard to believe, isn't it?***

**So what should a parent, partner or friend say or do for someone who's suffering.**

People are different, but personally I just want to be held - providing it's not too painful. That's usually the time when my mum knows best because she holds me, strokes my head and never tires of rocking and cradling me in her arms.

A supportive partner is a big help too. At times I've felt like 'The Fly' during metamorphosis, but my husband still tells me he loves me no matter how bad my skin looks or feels. I don't always believe him and occasionally break into self-destruct mode where nothing anybody says makes any difference.

**I know I'm one of the lucky ones who has a supportive family, but there are many who don't. That's why support from organisations like the Eczema Association of Australasia Inc are so important to stop people feeling isolated and alone.**

I am now trying homeopathic treatment after experimenting with faith healing, spiritual healing, yeast, dairy, and additive-free diets, internal and external use of Evening Primrose capsules, drinking soot mixed milk (for 'beneficial' sulphur content) and conventional drugs including hospital stays.

I know it's going to be hard - it already is as I'm currently trying to cut down my use of steroid cream which I've been told will counteract the treatment.

The big crunch will be when the homeopathic remedy becomes a case of treating like with like, which apparently will make my eczema worse before it gets better. If I can endure the agony I may be rid of it forever and it might reduce the risk of passing the condition on to my children - a situation I simply can't bear to think about.

When it's really bad I sometimes feel like I'd rather not have children than put them through this kind of suffering. So trying homeopathic remedies is my only remaining hope. If I want to avoid a lifetime of this, do I have any option?

*It is not the policy of the  
**ECZEMA ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALASIA INC**  
to recommend or endorse any product or  
treatment. It is part of the role of the  
Association to provide information on a wide  
range of products and treatments to keep those  
involved with eczema as fully informed as  
possible as to all options available.*





## TEACHER'S PACK FEEDBACK SHEETS

At the ECZEMA ASSOCIATION we are always looking for ways to improve this Education Pack and as a teacher who has used the pack we would greatly appreciate your comments.

Hopefully this will only take you a few moments, but should you wish to discuss it further please do not hesitate to contact the Eczema Association on 1300 300 182.

### 1. Please indicate below what was your previous understanding of eczema:

- a)  It's a bit of dry itchy skin - What's the problem?
- b)  I have eczema
- c)  I have a family member with eczema
- d)  It's a debilitating condition, which affects many children
- e)  I have taught **some** children whose eczema has affected their education/school life
- f)  I have taught **many** children whose eczema has affected their education/school life.
- g)  I have never taught **any** children with eczema

### FEEDBACK ON TEACHERS GUIDELINES

Tick the appropriate box

### 2. I found that the content was:

- a)  Too detailed
- b)  Just the right amount of detail
- c)  Not enough detail

### 3. When talking to the students about eczema I found the guidelines

- a)  Extremely useful
- b)  Useful
- c)  Not very useful

### ACTIVITY SHEETS (Puzzles, Draw a picture)

### 4. I used the activity sheets with:

- a)  Pre-School
- b)  Year 1
- c)  Year 2
- d)  Year 3

### 5. In my opinion the students found the activities

- a)  Too easy
- b)  Just right
- c)  Too hard

### 6. In my opinion, by doing the activities the students:

- a)  Increased their understanding of eczema
- b)  Did not increase their understanding of eczema

## TEACHER'S PACK FEEDBACK SHEETS page 2

### WORD SQUARE

7. The level of the word square was:

- a)  Too difficult    b)  Just right    c)  Too easy

### CIRCLE TIME

8. Did you use the Circle Time Activity?

- a)  Yes                      b)  No

9. If yes, in your opinion did it increase the children's understanding of eczema?

- a)  A lot                      b)  A little                      c)  Not at all

### OVERALL

10. Did you find that the worksheets were?

- a)  Extremely useful                      b)  Relative useful                      c)  Not at all useful

### ANY FURTHER COMMENTS

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PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED FORMS TO:  
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THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME

