



**NATIONAL  
Eczema  
ASSOCIATION**

# Atopic Dermatitis 101 for Adults



---

## WHAT IS ATOPIC DERMATITIS?

Atopic dermatitis (AD) is the most common type of eczema. It often appears as a red, itchy rash or dry, scaly patches on the skin. AD usually begins in infancy or childhood but can develop at any point in a person's lifetime. It commonly shows up on the face, inside of the elbows or behind the knees, but it can appear anywhere on the body.

## IS IT CONTAGIOUS?

You can't catch atopic dermatitis or spread it to others.

## WHAT CAUSED IT?

While the exact cause is unknown, researchers do know that people develop atopic dermatitis because of a combination of genes and a trigger. People with AD tend to have an over-reactive immune system that when triggered by something outside or inside the body, responds by producing inflammation. It is this inflammation that causes red, itchy and painful skin symptoms.

Research also shows that some people with atopic dermatitis have a mutation in the gene responsible for filaggrin. Filaggrin helps our bodies maintain a healthy protective barrier on the very top layer of the skin. Without enough filaggrin, moisture can escape and bacteria, viruses and more can enter. This is why many people with AD have very dry and infection-prone skin.

## IS AD RELATED TO OTHER CONDITIONS?

Atopic dermatitis is part of a group of allergic conditions. In fact, "atopic" means allergy. These include asthma, hay fever and food allergies. People who come from families with a history of AD, asthma or hay fever are more likely to develop AD.

Research also suggests that people with AD have higher rates of food allergy and depression/anxiety.

## IS THERE A CURE?

There is no cure for atopic dermatitis yet, but there are treatments available and more are on the way.

## WHAT ARE MY TREATMENT OPTIONS?

It is important to have a regular schedule with AD care that includes bathing with a gentle cleanser and moisturizing to lock water into the skin and repair the skin barrier. Moisturized skin helps control flares by combating dryness and keeping out irritants and allergens.

Depending on severity of symptoms and age, AD treatments include lifestyle changes, over-the-counter (OTC) and natural remedies, prescription topical medications, which are applied to the skin; biologics, given by injection; immunosuppressants, usually taken by mouth in the form of a pill; and phototherapy, a form of ultraviolet light treatment.

## HOW DO I CONTROL AD FLARES?

For most types of eczema, managing the condition comes down to these basics: 1. Know your triggers; 2. Implement a regular bathing and moisturizing routine; 3. Use OTC and/or prescription medication consistently and as prescribed.

However, some people find that even when they do all the "right" things, their AD still flares. AD can be an unpredictable disease. Having an eczema flare "out of the blue" is common and can happen despite your best efforts.

## ABOUT NEA

**National Eczema Association (NEA)** is the leading advocacy organization serving people with eczema and those who love them. Go to [nationaleczema.org](http://nationaleczema.org) to find out more.