

# How to Identify Childhood Skin Disorders

*Written by Kelly Isenberger*



Red rashes, itchy bumps, and breakouts can all cause a child or teen to become self-conscious during their most formative years. Fortunately, there are several forms of effective treatments for each.

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When McKenna Sheedy, a fourth-grader at Woodcreek Elementary, was diagnosed with psoriasis, the skin condition progressed so severely that it eventually covered 75% of her body, including her face. She eventually found an effective treatment, but the emotional damage had been done. "Some people would tease me and ask me if I had a disease," she recalls. "This really hurt my feelings. I went through a period of time when I was very sad and upset."

Along with psoriasis, the common skin disorders of acne and eczema can cause much frustration and embarrassment in a child's or teen's life. Fortunately, there are treatment options for all three conditions, as well as steps you can take to prevent them in your child or teen.

## Treating Eczema

Eczema, or atopic dermatitis, causes an itchy, red rash, which can vary in appearance among patients. The National Eczema Association estimates that 10% of infants and children are affected by this common skin disorder. "We don't know the exact cause of eczema, but kids with eczema frequently are also prone to allergies and asthma," explains Dr. Teresa Wright of Texas Children's Hospital. "They also have skin that is abnormally dry or sensitive and might lack certain proteins and fats in the skin, which promotes itching and rashes."

The best treatment option for eczema is to limit its effect. Trigger factors include dry skin, irritants, stress, heat and sweating, infections, and allergens. "The best treatment for any skin disorder is a good daily skin care regimen to repair the barrier function of skin," advises Dr. Wright. "A patient should take a short bath or shower every day, and apply moisturizers daily."

For much of her life, Lexie Cawley, a Taylor High School graduate, has dealt with eczema and the dry, flaky skin it causes. "It was worst for me when I sweat a lot in sports season on my elbows," she shares. "It would sting." Now, Cawley makes sure to keep her skin hydrated and has learned how to deal with the discomfort without scratching. "I was most embarrassed by it when I was in elementary school," says Cawley. "It looked like I had scabs all over my arms."

## Coping with Psoriasis

Psoriasis has been characterized as an autoimmune disorder, and usually appears as patches of raised, red skin covered by a flaky, white build-up of dead skin cells. The patches are often itchy and painful, and they often crack and bleed. With psoriasis, a person's immune system is triggered and skin cells replicate too quickly.

"There are many triggers for psoriasis," explains Dr. Wright. "Strep infections have been known to set off psoriasis. After the onset of psoriasis, sickness, injury to the skin, or unusual stress can cause it to progress." Treatment of the skin generally requires topical creams and medications. For more severe

cases, phototherapy and immunosuppressants have been found to be effective.

Throughout McKenna's struggles with psoriasis, her mother Felicia desperately sought answers and solutions. After trying many medications, McKenna eventually took Enbrel, an immunosuppressant. Her family members had to give her the shots themselves at home, and McKenna had to go in to the doctor often to get blood work done while she was taking the medication.

Felicia still recalls how the disorder took its toll emotionally. "The kids at school began to make fun of her," she recalls. While McKenna still has psoriasis, the condition is no longer severe. She recently joined the National Psoriasis Foundation and currently serves as their youth spokesperson for the Houston area. McKenna has also raised over \$1,000 walking in the National Psoriasis Foundation's Walk to Cure Psoriasis.



McKenna Sheedy, (pictured, center) with her twin sisters Emma Grace and Savannah Hope, now serves as a youth spokesperson for the National Psoriasis Foundation

Photo by Time Framed Photography

## Overcoming Acne

Acne is very common among teens, although it also affects adults. "Most patients are teenagers, but it can start as early as 9 or 10, for girls in particular," shares Dr. Wright. There is a misconception that acne is caused by dirt on one's face. In reality, there are four main causes of acne: bacteria, clogged pores, changes in hormones, and inflammation.

In treating a patient, doctors will often deal with the underlying factors that are causing the acne, such as using anti-inflammatory medications, antibiotics, and

medications that are aimed at unclogging the pores, or a combination of all of these. "It takes at least six to eight weeks of consistent use of medications for patients to see significant improvement in their acne," advises Dr. Wright. "Medication compliance is key, which can be the toughest battle with teens, who tend to be impatient and give up too soon."

Dr. Wright encourages patients struggling with acne to use a gentle cleanser one to two times per day, avoiding excessive scrubbing as acne-prone skin tends to be sensitive. Moisturizers, sunscreens, and makeup should all be oil-free (non-comedogenic). Avoid picking or squeezing pimples, which can promote inflammation and scarring. "Generally, it is much better to prevent scarring than to try and improve it after it has occurred," says Dr. Wright.

## Your Child's Best Advocate

If you or your child has any of these skin disorders, seek medical treatment and be your child's advocate. Only a parent will understand how living with any of these conditions can be frustrating, embarrassing, and possibly hindering to their child's self-esteem. Most importantly, instill in your child how wonderful they are, despite - and with - their skin condition.

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*KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy mom of two. One of her daughters had severe psoriasis and was successfully treated with phototherapy at Texas Children's Hospital.*



## Skincare Tips from the Experts

### *Acne*

- Use a gentle cleanser one to two times per day
- Avoid excessive scrubbing of the skin
- Only use oil-free moisturizers, sunscreens, and makeup
- Avoid picking or squeezing pimples
- See your dermatologist, who can prescribe an oral antibiotic, Accutane, or a topical benzoyl peroxide, antibiotic, or retinoid cream

### *Eczema*

- Take a short bath or shower every day
- Apply moisturizers daily
- Avoid irritants like allergens, stress, and sweating
- See your dermatologist, who can prescribe a topical steroid cream or, in severe cases, an immunosuppressant

### *Psoriasis*

- Take a warm bath daily using a mild soap
- Avoid rubbing your skin, as this can be irritating
- Moisturize skin daily
- Avoid scratching or picking at skin
- See a medical professional, who can prescribe topical creams and medications, or in more severe cases, phototherapy or an immunosuppressant

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