Eczema is actually just another word for dermatitis, which is an inflammation of the skin. There are many types of dermatitis, but the term eczema has come to be associated with a specific type of dermatitis, called atopic dermatitis. Atopic dermatitis is a chronic, noncontagious condition that causes itchy, inflamed skin. Atopic dermatitis (eczema) most commonly affects the insides of the elbows, the backs of the knees, and the face, but it can affect any area of the body and in rare cases may cover most of the body.

Although eczema can develop at any age, it is most common in infants and children. It is estimated that 65% of people with eczema develop symptoms in the first year of life, and 90% develop symptoms before age five. The condition often improves in adulthood, but 50% of those affected as children are affected throughout life.

A Baby With Eczema

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In the United States, it is estimated that 15 million people have eczema.

The exact cause of eczema is still unknown, but current theories suggest that it is related to an abnormal immune response and genetic factors. Eczema is often associated with other hereditary allergic disorders such as hay fever and asthma.

Eczema flare-ups may be triggered by:

- Extremes in temperature and climate
- Emotional stress
- Skin irritants
- Airborne and contact allergens
- Viral, bacterial, and possibly fungal infections of the skin
- Dry skin

What are the risk factors for eczema?
What are the symptoms of eczema?
How is eczema diagnosed?