

ECZEMA

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Your Moisture Manual  
for Eczema

Dermatologists serve up ideal  
moisturizing routines plus label-  
reading know-how.

by Jennifer Tzeses Health Writer



[Getty Images/FreshSplash](#)

IF YOU’RE AMONG the more than 30 million people suffering from eczema in the United States, you’re well aware of your kryptonite: dry skin. That’s because, the drier your skin, the worse it will itch and the more likely it will lead to a flare-up. One of

the best ways to douse the flames of a flare and keep skin comfy is by moisturizing on the regular. In fact, you can go right ahead and slather all you want. [Studies](#) show using a moisturizer can reduce symptoms of eczema. But not all ingredients are created equal, so knowing what to apply and when



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## Why Moisture Matters

Eczema is the great skin disrupter. Thanks to an immune system shakeup, inflammation occurs and is visible on the skin as redness, itchy scaling, dryness, and flaking, [says dermatologist Loretta Pratt, M.D.](#), of Advanced Dermatology PC in Chadds Ford, PA. “This interruption in the skin's protective barrier allows moisture to escape. Topical therapy with creams and

ointments [is] extremely important in treating eczema to repair the skin barrier and lock in moisture,” she says. What’s more, [research](#) shows water loss is higher in those with eczema, which contributes to dry



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## Formula 101

First things first. There is a spectrum when it comes to water content in moisturizers. “The higher the water content, the less actual hydrating ingredients and oils are present, making the cream too light and unable to create a barrier on the skin that will lock in moisture,” says [Ellen Marmur, M.D.](#), a board-certified dermatologist and founder of MMSkincare in New York City. What’s more, “Skin products with high water content evaporate easily from the skin and

cause further dryness and chapping effects,” Dr. Pratt says. Skip the lotions and go straight for creams and ointments, which have the lowest water content and highest amount of oil, so they provide deeper



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## Ingredients IQ

When it comes to eczema, knowing how to read the labels can go a long way toward feeling more comfortable in your own skin. First, make sure every product you use is labeled “hypoallergenic,” “for sensitive skin,” and “fragrance-free” (fragrances can dry out the skin). Gentle formulas are the only formulas you should be using, so you don’t make eczema symptoms worse. As you’re perusing the drugstore aisle, familiarize yourself with the over-the-

counter ingredients best for rehydrating and repairing the skin. [Ingredients to look for](#) include ceramides, glycerol, colloidal oats,

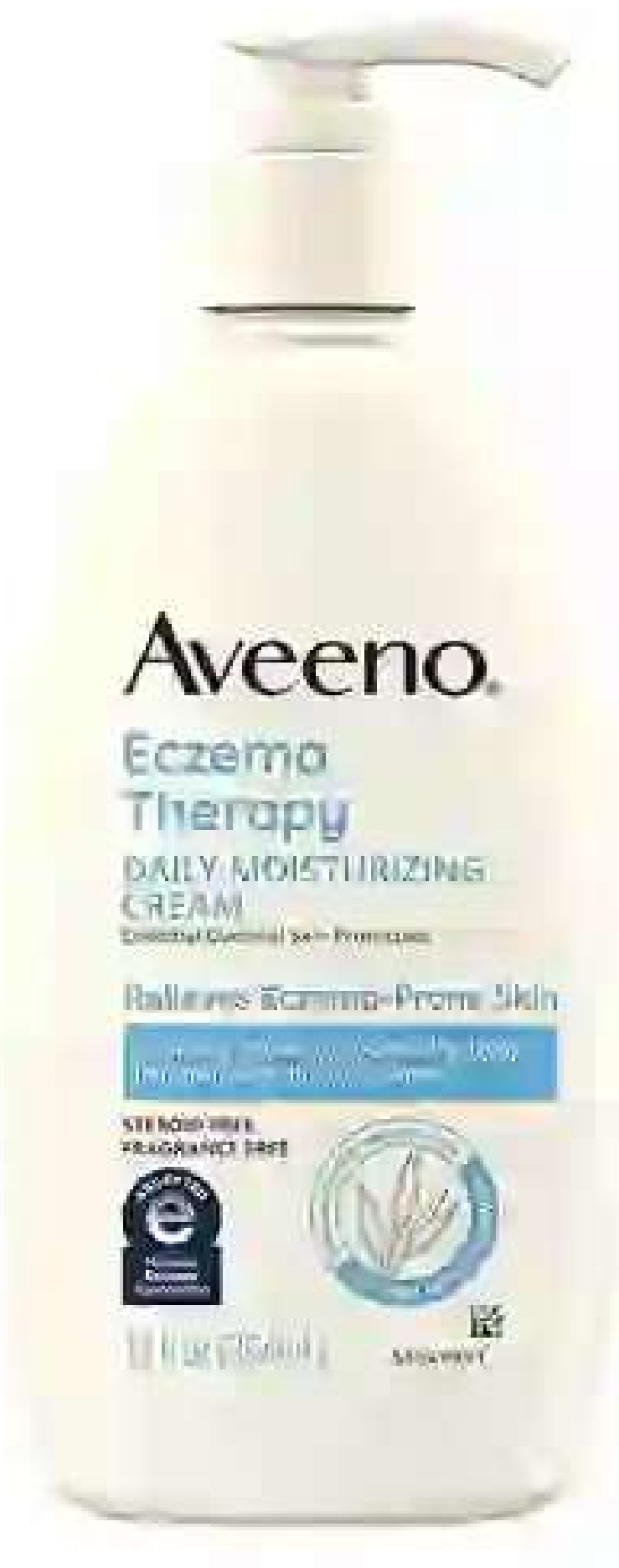


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## Petrolatum

A.K.A. good ol’ Vaseline, petrolatum seals in 99% of the water in the skin. However, Dr. Pratt notes, it’s a delicate balance, as some water loss sends signals to the repair mechanisms that produce fats in the skin to maintain the skin’s integrity. “Because it can cause skin to heat up and interfere with thermal regulation in the skin, petrolatum shouldn’t be used 24/7. Other, less-occlusive creams or ointments can be applied for part of each day,” Dr. Pratt says. Additionally, “Petrolatum shouldn’t be used in acne-prone areas despite the hype

about ‘[slugging](#)’ (slathering on Vaseline at



Courtesy of Aveeno

## Ceramides

These lipids (fatty acids), found in the skin’s barrier, help with moisture retention. Studies, including this one published in the journal [Dermatology Research and Practice](#), show people with eczema are deficient in certain ceramides, which help keep the skin moisturized. The application of synthetic ceramides mimics the functions of natural ceramides. Look for creams containing ceramides to help alleviate symptoms of dryness, Dr. Pratt says. Try [Aveeno Eczema Therapy Daily Moisturizing Cream](#) (\$19.67 for a 12-oz. bottle, Amazon), which contains ceramides and colloidal oatmeal (more on that later)

to relieve itch and irritation while strengthening the skin’s natural moisture



Courtesy of Cetaphil

## Urea

Urea is a natural humectant produced by the skin, which means it helps skin hold onto and attract moisture. It also works just like an exfoliant, sloughing off the top layer of dead skin cells to bring new, healthy skin to the surface. Urea improves dry, scaly skin as well as barrier function, and it has a built-in antimicrobial defense. Research, including this review in [\*Dermatology and Therapy\*](#), shows urea can increase skin penetration, which optimizes the action of topical medications. Try [Cetaphil Daily Smoothing Moisturizer for Rough & Bumpy](#)



[Skin](#) (\$15.97, Amazon), which contains



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## Shea Butter & Coconut Oil

While all but ingrained in our collective brains as all-star ingredients to slather on dry skin, these cultural go-tos can also be effective remedies for the symptoms of eczema, Dr. Marmur says. Shea butter’s richness in vitamin C makes it an efficient anti-inflammatory and moisturizer.

“Coconut oil contains anti-bacterial properties such as lauric acid, which can alleviate the irritation caused by eczema as well as combat dryness,” she adds.

However, Dr. Pratt advises keeping coconut oil away from acne-prone areas because it can clog pores and make acne worse.



Additionally, those with coconut allergies



Courtesy of Aveeno

## Oatmeal

Colloidal oatmeal (which is finely ground) [has been shown](#) to be incredibly beneficial for those with eczema. Oatmeal forms a protective film on the skin and helps it retain water. In addition, it can help maintain skin surface pH, help relieve itch and irritation, and reduce inflammation. What’s more, people who use moisturizers containing oats have been found to have fewer eczema flare-ups and less need to use prescription corticosteroids than people who don’t use any type of moisturizer. Try [Aveeno Eczema Therapy Rescue Relief Treatment Gel Cream](#) (\$ 13.97, Walmart),

which is formulated with 2% colloidal



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## Ingredients to Avoid

While there are many ingredients that are effective for treating eczema symptoms, there are also a few you should avoid like the plague. “Glycolic acid, salicylic acid, and retinol are all ingredients that tend to dry out and irritate the skin, so these should be avoided for those already facing this issue due to eczema,” Dr. Marmur says. Other offenders include cinnamic aldehyde; lanolin, which people with eczema tend to be sensitive to; propylene glycol, which can cause irritation; and Balsam of Peru, which can cause your skin to react with redness, swelling, itching, and fluid-filled blisters.



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## Slathering Schedule

The good news is, you really can’t moisturize too much, though experts say twice a day (and after bathing or washing your hands) is recommended. “But for extra-dry skin, a good rule of thumb is to add lotion whenever you feel your skin becoming dry,” Dr. Marmur says. The reason applying moisturizer (within three minutes) after a bath is key is because doing so any later makes the product evaporate faster and could cause the skin to become even drier. Look for products labeled with the National Eczema Association Seal of Acceptance, which means they’ve been thoroughly vetted as safe and effective for those with eczema.