

Atopic Dermatitis: A Guide to Bathing

*By Tanya Greywal, BA and Lawrence F. Eichenfield, MD
University of California, San Diego / Rady Children's Hospital, San Diego*

1. How often and for how long should you bathe or shower?

- There are no comparative studies that clarify the optimal frequency and duration of bathing for people with atopic dermatitis
- Physicians generally recommend a bath or shower at least once per day for a short period of time (eg, 5-10 minutes)

2. What is the best water temperature to use?

- Lukewarm water
- Avoid extreme temperatures (very hot or very cold)

3. What is the best way to cleanse your skin?

- Gentle cleansing
- Avoid vigorous scrubbing of the skin
- Do not use washcloths, loofahs, or brushes to clean the skin

4. What type of product should be used to clean the skin?

- A gentle cleansing bar or wash without fragrances or dyes
- A non-soap cleanser with a low-pH (less than 5.5). The pH of normal skin is 4.0-5.5, while the average pH of soap is 9.0-10.5; therefore, a lower pH cleanser may help to avoid skin irritation.
- Sometimes you may want to limit the use of soap to reduce possible skin irritation, especially when your eczema is flaring.

5. What does cleansing remove from your skin?

- Natural oils produced by your skin (sebum)
- Environmental dirt, allergens, and irritants
- Dead skin cells (desquamated keratinocytes)
- Skincare products, medications, moisturizers, cosmetics, etc.

6. How does water affect your skin?

- Water hydrates, softens, and cleanses the skin
- It can irritate and dry the skin when you do not moisturize after a bath or shower

7. What is important to do right after a bath or shower?

- Lightly pat yourself dry with a towel without completely drying your skin (do not rub or scrub the skin)
- Apply any topical medications recommended by your physician
- Moisturize your skin in order to maintain hydration

8. What are some other types of baths that my doctor may recommend and why are they important?

Bleach Baths – reduce the risk of superficial skin infections by decreasing the bacteria on the skin

- It is like soaking in a swimming pool!
- Pour 60 mL ($\approx \frac{1}{4}$ cup) of liquid bleach (sodium hypochlorite 6%) into a full bathtub of water
- Soak for 10 minutes, then rinse the skin with fresh lukewarm water

Salt Baths – may help to reduce irritation and discomfort that occurs when bathing while skin is very inflamed and irritated

- Add 240 mL (≈ 1 cup) of table salt to a full bathtub of water