

# Dry skin in babies with a focus on Aveeno® baby products

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A baby's skin is extra delicate and sensitive, and even the smallest things seem to irritate it. This means a baby's skin is particularly prone to dryness, especially in the colder months. Relief is relatively easy to come by, and precautions such as taking extra care during and after bathtime to lock in moisture will help repair dry, itchy, irritated skin. Using gentle products specially formulated for sensitive skin can also keep an infant's skin healthy and hydrated.

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## Introduction

Pharmacy staff will often be approached for help by concerned parents when their baby's skin is not quite "as soft as a baby's bottom". Parents and/or caregivers may have noticed rough spots, scaly patches, or even peeling skin on the baby's body. Baby skin is more sensitive than adult skin and therefore more prone to dryness. The baby's skin also needs to adjust to their new environment, including skincare products and clothing.

### What does dry skin in babies look like?

Roughness, flakiness, dullness and fine lines or cracks are all signs that the baby's skin needs more moisture. Dry spots can strike anywhere, but they're especially common on the hands, feet, face and lips. Mild dryness probably won't bother the baby much, but very dry skin can get irritated, which can lead to scratching. Dry skin and eczema (atopic dermatitis) can have some symptoms in common. Almost all those with eczema also have dry skin, but not all with dry skin have eczema.<sup>1</sup> Eczema typically shows up as red or purple patches of dry skin on a baby's face and in the creases of knees and elbows.<sup>2</sup> It is also more likely to occur in babies with a family history of atopic diseases, such as allergic rhinitis or asthma.

### What causes dry skin in babies?

Newborns are born covered in vernix – a thick coating that protects the baby's skin from amniotic fluid. After birth, the baby will begin to shed the outer layer of their skin within one to three weeks. The amount of peeling varies and depends on whether the birth was premature or overdue – the earlier a baby is born, the more vernix they will have and the less they may peel. In either case, some dryness and peeling of the skin after birth are typical. Skin flaking will go away on its own and doesn't usually require special care, but,

because a newborn's skin is sensitive, it is advisable to avoid harsh chemicals, detergents, perfumes or scented products.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the same things that make adult skin dry can also cause dry skin in a baby. It is important to understand that a baby's skin isn't just softer than most adults, it's also thinner – by at least 20% according to existing studies.<sup>4</sup> This means that it is extra susceptible to environmental changes and more prone to losing moisture than an adult's skin.<sup>4</sup> Some common causes of dry skin to consider and avoid are:

- Exposure to extreme temperatures, wind and dry air – especially common in winter – can sap sensitive skin of its natural moisture.<sup>1</sup>
- Bathing in too hot water with excessive soap exposure will dry the baby's skin out by washing away the natural oils on the skin's surface.<sup>2</sup>
- Some babies are also genetically prone to having drier skin than others, meaning their skin barrier doesn't keep moisture locked in as effectively.<sup>1</sup>
- Allergens – pet hairs, dust, or cigarette smoke can irritate and dry out the skin.<sup>4</sup>
- Vitamin or mineral deficiencies may also underlie a baby's dry skin, as this external barrier relies on these nutrients to stay healthy. Vitamin A, vitamin D, niacin, zinc and iron are all critical dietary components for maintaining soft, supple skin.<sup>4</sup>

If caregivers are not sure what could be causing flare-ups of dry skin on the baby, advise them to try keeping a diary of whenever the skin seems dry. This may help identify potential patterns to work out what might be behind the issue.<sup>2</sup>

### Treating dry skin in babies

The first steps in remedying infant dry skin are to:

- Prewash or rewash all the fabrics the baby's skin encounters by using a mild, fragrance-free detergent
- Increase the humidity in the environmental areas where the baby spends the most time
- Adapt or limit bath time

Caregivers should select fragrance-free, hypoallergenic soaps, and avoid the bubble bath products altogether. Also, advise caregivers to pat the baby's skin dry as vigorously rubbing the skin after a bath will remove both moisture and essential skin oils.<sup>4</sup> Babies are not very active, so they can be "top and tail" spot cleaned using a face cloth or gentle alcohol-free wipes instead of a full bath every day. Apply a fragrance-free, hypoallergenic moisturiser daily, especially right after their bath. Advise caregivers to keep the baby hydrated, ensuring he or she gets plenty of fluids from breast milk and/or formula, but only offering water when the paediatrician's guidelines specify.

AVEENO® Baby products are formulated to protect the baby's skin by using high-quality oat kernel extract and oat flour to enhance their moisturising and soothing properties. The AVEENO® baby range is hypoallergenic, paraben- and phthalate-free, and soap-free.<sup>5</sup> There are several variants available on the South African market:

AVEENO® BABY DAILY CARE MOISTURISING LOTION is formulated with oatmeal, which helps to strengthen the baby's skin barrier. The nourishing, non-greasy, fast-absorbing formula is clinically proven to moisturise the baby's skin for a full 24 hours, protecting it from dryness and is suitable for use on the body and face, and for eczema-prone skin. Tested by paediatricians and dermatologists, the lotion is unscented and dye-free. For a complete routine, the manufacturer recommends use with AVEENO® BABY DAILY CARE HAIR & BODY WASH.<sup>6</sup>

AVEENO® BABY SOOTHING RELIEF EMOLLIENT CREAM is enriched with Vitamin E and 100% pure oat oil and is clinically proven to moisturise for 24 hours helping soothe a drier, more sensitive skin.

This product is suitable for eczema-prone skin, being pH-balanced, unscented and free from dyes. The manufacturer recommends use with AVEENO® BABY SOOTHING RELIEF EMOLLIENT WASH.<sup>7</sup>

AVEENO® BABY DERMEXA™ EMOLLIENT CREAM is specially formulated for babies with very dry, itchy skin who are more prone to frequent irritation and itchiness.

It is suitable for eczema-prone skin and is clinically proven to soothe skin with immediate effect. Of the AVEENO® Baby Range, this product has the highest concentration of oat extract, oat oil and oatmeal.

The product is unscented and enriched with ceramides, an essential component of the skin structure, which helps to strengthen the skin barrier function.

The caregiver should gently massage the product into the baby's skin after washing with AVEENO® BABY DERMEXA MOISTURISING WASH.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Occasional dry skin may occur in most babies from time to time. With a few adjustments to skincare routines, most cases of dry skin in babies can be effectively prevented and managed. However, if the skin seems particularly dry or is associated with itching, it is best to refer the baby to the doctor.

## References

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