Atopic Dermatitis (Eczema)

What is it?
Atopic dermatitis (also called eczema) is a red, dry, extremely itchy rash. The rash often starts on the cheeks at 2 to 6 months of age. The rash is mostly on inner surfaces of elbows, wrists and knees. It can start later in older children.

What Causes Atopic Dermatitis?
Eczema is a type of sensitive, dry skin that runs in families. Many people with excema will have dry skin for their entire lives. Eczema can be triggered by contact with irritating substances (for example, soap or chlorine). In 30% of infants with eczema, flare-ups can occur within 2 hours of eating certain foods (such as cow's milk, eggs or peanut butter). Many children with excema also have asthma.

How is it Treated?

- **Hydrate the skin.** Use special creams to hydrate or moisturize the skin. Hydration prevents flare-ups. Soaking in a bath once a day for 10 minutes may also help the itching. Frequent baths are not recommended because they cause more dryness in the skin. Soaps make eczema worse. Young children usually do not need soap. Teenagers need soap to wash under the arms, the genital area and the feet.

- **Lubricating cream.** After the bath, apply a cream such as Keri, Lubriderm, Nivea, Nutraderm or Eucerin. Put on the cream within three minutes after the bath to trap the moisture in the skin. The cream should also be re-applied two or three times per day in severe eczema.

- **Antihistamine medicine.** An antihistamine such as benadryl can be used at bedtime for itching that is keeping your child from getting to sleep or causes your child to wake up during the night.

- **Steroid creams** After moisturizing creams, steroid creams are the main treatment for eczema. They are used WITH the moisturizing cream; they should not be used alone. Some children need two types of steroid creams: one preventive cream to treat mild eczema and another stronger cream to stop a flare-up once it has started. These should be prescribed and managed by your primary care physician.
How can I prevent eczema?
Cotton clothes should be worn as much as possible. Avoid triggers that cause eczema to flare up, such as sweating, excessive cold, dry air (use a humidifier), chlorine, harsh chemicals and soaps. Never use bubble bath.

Call or see your doctor If:
- Your child's skin rash has pus or soft yellow scabs coming from it.
- Your child's rash flares up after he or she has been around someone with cold sores (fever blisters), especially if blisters develop on the skin.
- Your child has swollen lips or tongue.
- Your child has trouble breathing or swallowing.