

Supplementary Data

MY ITCHY SKIN

Name: _____

Date: _____

HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO HELP YOUR ITCHY SKIN WITHOUT SCRATCHING IT.

- 1) BE AWARE**
- 2) QUICK RELIEF**
- 3) DISTRACTION**

ON THE NEXT PAGES YOU CAN DISCOVER SOME WAYS TO HELP YOUR ITCHY SKIN.

ITCHING AND SCRATCHING

My atopic dermatitis (eczema) makes my skin itch. Scratching feels good, but I know that scratching will just make it itchier and more sore later on.

HELP ME TO NOT SCRATCH BY HELPING ME WITH~

1) AWARENESS-

My skin itches, and lots of times I don't know I am scratching.

I sometimes need to be reminded that I am scratching. Grown-ups can use kind signals to remind me that I am scratching (for example, touching my hand).

I WOULD LIKE GROWN-UPS TO REMIND ME THAT I'M SCRATCHING

Circle the ways that grown-ups can help you be aware that you are scratching. Cross out the ones that you don't want them to do.

Touch my hand	Yell at me	Say my name
Punish me	Make a secret signal	Get my attention
Put me in time out	Touch my head	Make me feel bad

On the lines, write some more things that grown-ups can do to help you.

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2) QUICK RELIEF

I need to do something to make my skin feel better right away.

Circle the things you can do to feel better right away. Put a star by the ones that are best for you. Cross out the ones that would make your skin worse.

Pat the itchy spot	Put a cold washcloth on it	Drink cold water
Scratch it hard	Put cream on it	Change out of scratchy clothes
Take a bath	Go to a private place and scratch	Scratch it gently
Ask for a backrub	Wait until bedtime to scratch	Go to a cooler room

On the lines, write some more things that you can do to feel better right away.

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3) DISTRACTION

After I feel a little better, I should get interested in something else.

Circle the things you can do to that will take your mind off of your skin. Put a star by the ones that are best for you. Cross out the ones that would make your skin worse.

Watch a movie	Read	Think about how itchy my skin is	
Play with toys	Eat	Do artwork	Play with friends
Tell everyone how itchy I am	Do schoolwork	Go to dance class	

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It is also good to find something for my fingers to do.

Circle the things you can do to keep your fingers busy. Put a star by the ones that are best for you. Cross out the ones that would make your fingers scratch.

Eat popcorn	Squeeze a ball	Hold someone's hand	Play with Legos
Hide hands under the desk and scratch	String beads	Play with clay	
Put hands in pockets	Paint my nails	Play video games	

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For Teachers: Helping a student with persistent atopic dermatitis

Itching and scratching. The hallmark of atopic dermatitis is its extreme itchiness. The itching is so bad that it feels better to scratch, often breaking the skin, than to tolerate the continued itching. This is what your student is experiencing, and why he/she wants to scratch. However, scratching the skin makes the eczema worse. So in order to improve the eczema, the student should not scratch the skin.

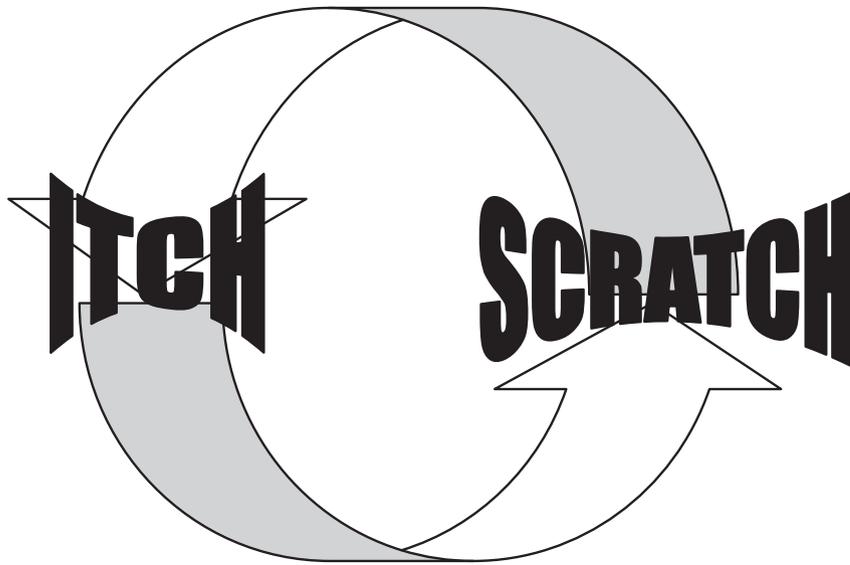
Not scratching requires a great deal of self-control, which young children are developing in many areas, but usually have not mastered completely. Further, much of the scratching is unconscious; the child does it without being aware of doing it. When anxious or stressed, the itching and scratching will increase. If you watch, you will notice increased scratching when a student is faced with academic or interpersonal challenges.

A teacher's help in the classroom can make a tremendous difference. Have a private talk with the student, so that he or she knows that you are going to work together to control scratching. You might decide to have a signal that you can use to alert him or her to the scratching. You might decide that it is best to have hands on top of the desk, so the hands don't involuntarily scratch under the desk. Your student may need to keep a squeeze ball or a worry stone handy to keep hands occupied. He/she may wish to have cream available to apply to affected skin. These are positive ways of coping with the itching and should be supported.

It is critical that there be a collaborative effort between you and the child. The minute that the scratching, or the student's attempts to cope, becomes the focus of a power struggle (i.e. the child feels you are against her, rather than with her), the scratching will increase. If this happens, back off and figure out how to get back on the same side as the child. Your supportive help will mean a great deal to her.

Self-esteem. Having atopic dermatitis can have negative effects on a child's self-esteem, in part because the affected skin is so visible. School children with atopic dermatitis may be very sensitive to the perceptions of others. Sometimes they are bullied or subjected to rude questioning. Teachers can be very helpful for children with eczema who are dealing with these issues. With such a medical condition, it is often helpful if classmates are provided an opportunity to learn about it. This decreases curiosity, and usually increases empathy with and acceptance of the child with the condition. Whether this is done and how it is handled depends first and foremost on the sensitivities of the child with the condition. It could be completely impersonal, as an example in a health unit (e.g., when learning about germs, atopic dermatitis is an example of a condition that is not contagious). Some children choose to do a presentation about their condition, or to have their parents do one. Of course, requiring that the children treat each other with respect enhances the self-esteem of all.

The Itch-Scratch Cycle



"My Itchy Skin" is a workbook that grew out of working with an 11-year-old female with atopic dermatitis. She loved it; she seemed to find it empowering. After the two of us worked through it together, she made several additional worksheet pages - in her handwriting, with more boxes and fill-in-the-blank sentences - that she hoped would help other kids. I subsequently used the workbook with children of various ages with AD, most often together with their parent. Many parents asked for copies to take home to show family members and teachers.

In writing a paper addressing behavioral aspects of AD, I wished to include "My Itchy Skin" not only as a tool for children, families, counselors, medical providers, etc., but also as an illustration of several important points to keep in mind when helping children to cope with AD.

- The critical role of providing education about the itch-scratch cycle to affected children as well as to all members of their family, social and healthcare networks.
- The importance of talking with children of all ages about their experience, including
 - acknowledging and empathizing with them about how terrible the itching feels. Children often feel that no one really understands what they are experiencing;
 - appreciating and understanding the need to scratch – that in the moment, scratching to the point of pain and drawing blood is preferable to itching, and scratching can be a compelling choice for them;
 - yet sometimes, they are unaware that they are scratching – they might be unconscious of it, perhaps it is a habit, but we understand that they are not doing it on purpose (or to "manipulate" others);
 - understanding how exceedingly frustrating it is when adults repeatedly remind them to not scratch, particularly when those adults are critical or angry with them and seem to have no understanding of their experience;
 - nevertheless, there is a need to accept help from adults in order to refrain from scratching and learn positive coping skills;
 - the need for a positive working relationship with those adults;
 - and lastly, the value of choosing their own real-life behavioral strategies for dealing with itching, including conscious self-distraction.

"My Itchy Skin" is available to anyone who wishes to use it to establish a dialogue with children with AD. My hope is that by using the workbook to begin conversations between children with AD and their helping adults, these children will feel understood, less stressed, and empowered to learn to cope and manage their AD.

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