

# Study Debunks a Big Myth for Eczema and Bathing

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › A University of Nottingham study with 438 participants found that daily and weekly bathing were equally effective in managing eczema symptoms, quality of life, and treatment needs over four weeks
- › The research reveals bathing frequency matters less than post-bath skincare. Both groups improved similarly when following up with moisturizers, giving patients flexibility to choose routines that suit their lifestyles without worsening symptoms
- › Weekly bathers used topical steroid creams slightly less frequently than daily bathers, suggesting less frequent bathing may reduce medication dependency while maintaining skin stability when combined with proper moisturizing habits
- › For optimal eczema management, use lukewarm water with gentle, fragrance-free cleansers, pat skin dry, and immediately apply moisturizer while skin remains damp to lock in moisture and strengthen the protective barrier
- › Natural remedies like baking soda, colloidal oatmeal, and Dead Sea salt added to baths provide anti-inflammatory benefits and can help soothe itching, reduce redness, and improve skin hydration when used appropriately

Around 31.7 million Americans today suffer from eczema,<sup>1</sup> a skin disease characterized by chronic skin inflammation, redness, and relentless itching.<sup>2</sup> Left untreated, it can interfere with sleep, which subsequently affects your focus, emotional well-being, and [overall quality of life.](#)<sup>3</sup>

There are many myths surrounding the management of eczema. One of the most popular is finding the sweet spot for bathing frequency. As it turns out, there is no correct answer. According to a new study, both are equally viable, as long as you do it properly.

## **Do People with Eczema Need to Avoid Bathing?**

Does frequent bathing make eczema worse? This hypothesis was explored in a study published in the British Journal of Dermatology. The research compared the effects of daily versus weekly bathing on eczema symptoms over a four-week period.<sup>4</sup>

Led by dermatologists at the University of Nottingham, the research involved 438 participants aged 1 year and older who were diagnosed with eczema. They were randomly assigned to either bathe daily (six or more times a week) or weekly (once or twice a week). The goal was to determine whether bathing more or less frequently affected symptom severity, quality of life, or treatment use.

- **Either bathing frequency worked** – The researchers measured skin symptoms, itching, and the overall burden of the disease using weekly questionnaires. The results were strikingly consistent – both groups improved equally over time, showing that bathing frequency mattered far less than how you care for the skin afterward.
- **The researchers tracked multiple measures to ensure accuracy** – They looked at itch intensity, eczema control, and life quality scores. Across every measure, both daily and weekly bathers experienced similar results. Importantly, neither group had a higher rate of flare-ups or side effects, and there were no reports of serious harm from bathing more or less frequently.
- **The study also measured how often participants used topical steroid creams** – These are the prescription treatments many people apply to control redness and itching during flare-ups. The weekly bathing group reported slightly fewer days of

steroid use than the daily group, suggesting that bathing less often can reduce reliance on medicated creams.

However, this doesn't mean bathing less "cures" eczema. It simply indicates that once-daily or weekly routines both support skin stability when paired with moisturizer use.

## What Does the New Eczema Bathing Study Actually Test?

Again, the study involved 438 participants. However, what's interesting about the participants was the diversity of ages. The youngest was only a year old, while the oldest was 89 years old. This means that the findings apply to all ages.<sup>5</sup>

- **The research is worth noting for its patient-centered design** — This study was part of a broader "citizen science" approach, meaning real patients helped shape the trial questions and methods. The researchers wanted the results to apply to everyday life, not just controlled laboratory conditions. As noted by one of the researchers:<sup>6</sup>

*"The findings of our study are great news for people living with eczema. It means they can choose a frequency of bathing that suits them. It was fantastic to work so closely with people living with eczema to co design this study. Together, we're starting to answer questions about living with eczema that haven't had enough attention in research until now."*

- **Bathing supports the skin microbiome** — Did you know that aside from your gut, your skin is also home to a special kind of microbiome that acts as a protective layer? No matter the bathing frequency you choose, it has a positive effect on your [skin microbiome](#). Andrew Proctor, chief executive of the National Eczema Society, commented on the featured study:<sup>7</sup>

*"The other thing about eczema and the skin is that the microbiome plays quite an important role in eczema. And by bathing regularly, it does influence the microbiome and the balance of different bacteria on the skin."*

- **Limitations of the research** – The researchers noted that the participants were generally healthy with the exception of being diagnosed with eczema. This means that throughout the course of the four-week analysis, very severe flare-ups and any coexisting infections weren't recorded. Thus, personalizing your bathing routine is still recommended to fit your current situation to reduce contraindications.

## **Age and Lifestyle Recommendations – Babies, Kids, and Adults**

Based on the findings, you have free rein to come up with a bathing frequency that works best for you. Here are some tips to get you started on the right path:

- **Practical takeaways for parents managing a child's eczema** – Many families struggle with the daily bathing debate, often facing conflicting advice from doctors and online sources. Some are told that daily baths hydrate the skin; others are warned they strip natural oils and worsen dryness.

The new evidence shows that both daily and weekly schedules work equally well if you follow up with moisturizers. This helps reduce family stress, saves time, and supports consistency – something every parent will value greatly.

- **Relief for adults juggling busy schedules** – For adults, your bathing routine doesn't need to feel like a chore or another medical prescription you have to religiously follow. The results give you permission to personalize your care without worry. The new-found freedom will also help you reduce stress levels. As noted in a 2023 study, stress contributes to eczema flareups:<sup>8</sup>

*"Psychological stress is an important factor to consider in the management of patients with AD (atopic dermatitis). In particular, chronic stress tends to worsen AD. The type of stress can possibly also affect the quality of the pruritus experienced by the patients. Unforeseen events and decision making were frequently mentioned as important triggers. Furthermore, physical exercise was reported to provide beneficial effects."*

- **The psychological benefit of the study** – Tan Nguyen, advanced pharmacist in dermatology and biologics at University Hospitals of Derby and Burton Foundation Trust, commented on the mental impact of eczema, and went on to praise the findings of the featured study:<sup>9</sup>

*"For many people living with eczema, the condition isn't just physical. It also carries an emotional burden. Patients often feel anxious about whether everyday habits, like bathing might worsen their eczema. This anxiety is compounded by conflicting advice from different sources on how often they should bathe.*

*The findings from this study are reassuring, as they suggest that the frequency of bathing doesn't negatively impact eczema symptoms. This removes unnecessary restrictions and gives patients more flexibility to fit their routine. This can aid in reducing stress and support overall wellbeing."*

## **Step-by-Step Eczema-Friendly Bathing Routine**

Based on the findings of the featured study, the best bath routine for eczema has been answered. All that's left is the "how" aspect, which is equally as important. According to the National Eczema Association, those who have this disease usually have very dry skin most of the time, making them vulnerable to bacteria and viruses. They said that following a regular bathing (plus skincare routine) will help strengthen your barrier to help retain important moisture.<sup>10</sup>

- **Frequency** – The National Eczema Association recommends showering once a day using the following guidelines:<sup>11</sup>
  - Use lukewarm water, not hot water.
  - Use a gentle, fragrance- and dye-free cleanser for sensitive skin.
  - Do not rub or scrub skin with a washcloth or loofah.

- Pat the skin dry with a towel.
- Apply moisturizer while skin is still moist.
- **The question regarding moisturizing** – A crucial aspect of eczema management is moisturizing your skin after bathing or showering, as this helps prevent eczema symptoms. Specifically, the goal is to help relieve dryness and itching. More importantly, it helps repair the skin barrier to keep out allergens and other pollutants. So, remember to moisturize whenever you expose your skin to water:<sup>12</sup>
  - After bathing
  - After washing hands
  - Whenever your skin starts to feel itchy or dry
- **The ideal moisturizer to use** – When it comes to choosing which moisturizing product to buy, **avoid scented ones** as they typically contain chemicals that irritate your skin. Stick to bland, scent-free varieties with natural ingredients. Moreover, apply them while your skin is still damp to maximize benefits.<sup>13</sup>

## Bath Additives and Special Treatments

In addition to optimizing your bathing routine and frequency, here are three home remedies you can try that can help manage your symptoms better:<sup>14</sup>

- **Baking soda** – Mix a quarter-cup of baking soda into your bath. Follow these steps:<sup>15</sup>
  1. Add 1/4 cup of baking soda to a lukewarm bath.
  2. Soak for 15 to 20 minutes.
  3. Thoroughly rinse the body with cool water.
  4. Follow with a gentle, fragrance-free moisturizer.

Why baking soda? This common household product contains sodium and bicarbonate ions, which fully dissolve in water. These contain mild anti-inflammatory and pH-balancing properties to help manage symptoms. However, the National Eczema Association doesn't recommend excess use, as it may eventually disrupt the skin microbiome that can result in dryness and irritation. It would be wise to limit its use.<sup>16</sup>

- **Colloidal oatmeal** – This refers to oatmeal that has been finely ground, then boiled. According to Dr. Gowri Kabbur, "boiling the oats extracts the colloidal material, which contains starches and other beneficial molecules."<sup>17</sup>

So, how do you use it within the context of eczema management? The National Eczema Association noted that pouring 1 cup into a bath will help soothe symptoms thanks to its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.<sup>18</sup>

Trials support the use of colloidal oatmeal. In one study, researchers noted that it contains avenanthramides, which help reduce itching and overall inflammation.<sup>19</sup> In another study, it has been shown to help improve pH levels, as well as skin barrier function and hydration within 14 days of use.<sup>20</sup>

- **Dead Sea salt** – If colloidal oatmeal isn't available, you can pour 1 to 2 cups of Dead Sea salt in your bath instead. It also has anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial benefits, thanks to being predominantly made from magnesium salts.<sup>21</sup> As noted in one study:<sup>22</sup>

*"Bathing in the Dead Sea salt solution significantly improved skin barrier function compared with the tap water-treated control forearm in the subgroup with elevated basal TEWL. Skin hydration was enhanced on the forearm treated with the Dead Sea salt in each group, which means the treatment moisturized the skin.*

*Skin roughness and redness of the skin as a marker for inflammation were significantly reduced after bathing in the salt solution. This demonstrates that bathing in the salt solution was well tolerated, improved skin barrier*

*function, enhanced stratum corneum hydration, and reduced skin roughness and inflammation."*

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Eczema Management**

**Q: Can people with eczema bathe every day without making symptoms worse?**

**A:** Yes. A study published in the British Journal of Dermatology found that both daily and weekly bathing routines are equally effective for managing eczema symptoms, as long as proper moisturizing is done afterward. Bathing more often did not increase flare-ups, itching, or skin irritation. The key factor is how you care for the skin immediately after bathing, not how often you bathe.

**Q: Is a bath or a shower better when you have eczema?**

**A:** Both baths and showers are equally effective for people with eczema. The National Eczema Association emphasizes that the real issue is overusing water without moisturizing afterward, which can dry the skin. If you use lukewarm water, avoid harsh scrubbing, and apply moisturizer right after – either method works well.

**Q: How long can you stay in the bath or shower if you have eczema?**

**A:** Keep baths or showers short, about 10 to 15 minutes. Use lukewarm water and gentle fragrance-free cleansers, and avoid washcloths that may irritate the skin. After bathing, pat dry and moisturize immediately while the skin is still damp to lock in hydration.

**Q: How often can you bathe a baby or toddler with eczema?**

**A:** According to the featured study, babies and toddlers with eczema can bathe daily or weekly – both are effective when followed by proper moisturizing. The study included children as young as 1 year old, and outcomes were the same across age groups. Parents can choose whichever routine is easier, more comfortable, or fits their child's lifestyle, as long as they apply moisturizer right after bathing.

**Q: What is the best way to moisturize after bathing with eczema?**

**A:** Moisturizing immediately after bathing is essential. Follow these tips:

- Pat skin dry (don't rub).
- Apply a fragrance-free, dye-free, gentle moisturizer while the skin is still damp.
- Use creams or ointments rather than lotions for better hydration.
- Moisturize after washing hands and any time skin feels dry or itchy.

## Sources and References

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