



# ATOPIC SKIN DISEASE

THE ONLINE COMMUNITY FOR PRACTITIONERS AND PATIENTS

[www.atopicskindisease.com](http://www.atopicskindisease.com)

## Habit reversal and chronic atopic eczema in adults

by Dr Christopher Bridgett & Dr Peter Norén

When scratching because of itch repeats often enough it becomes a habit - then it can happen without itch, and *without awareness*. This is a damaging complication of atopic eczema that can **prevent usual treatment healing** the skin. Habit reversal is needed - together with optimal topical treatment: a **combined approach!**



Chronic atopic eczema

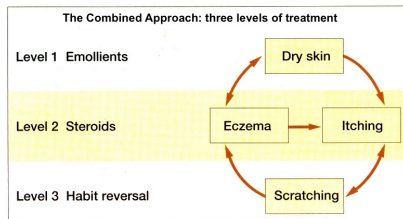
This dry, thick and flaky skin is **chronic atopic eczema: caused by habitual rubbing and scratching**. Being told to **"stop scratching"** can make things worse... and wearing gloves and keeping nails short... may not help.

What can work is a **combined approach!**  
Optimal topical treatment + **habit reversal!**  
Then **healing** will follow...



Chronic atopic eczema

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### How to do habit reversal...*successfully*

#### 1. Preparation

**Success** depends on first understanding the problem - then, making some time to solve it: perhaps 5 to 6 weeks. Involving others usually helps.

#### 2. Awareness

Next, **before starting habit reversal\***, awareness of what is happening is **necessary**. For one week a counter is used to count the total number of scratching episodes each day. A record is made of all the times and circumstances when scratching usually happens.

#### 3. Habit reversal

**NB Start habit reversal\* only after 1 & 2 above.**

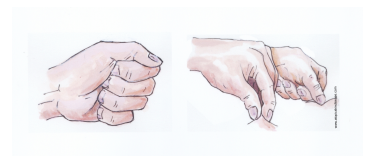
All scratching and rubbing is now replaced by first making fists with both hands for 30 seconds. Then, if there is any itch, the itchy skin is pinched or pressed with a nail until the itch goes. Plans are made for difficult situations. Keeping hands busy and doing things quickly helps. Others can help by giving positive prompts! With persistent practice habit reversal works really quickly.

#### \* Topical treatment

It is **important** that prescribed creams and ointments are used correctly **at the same time as habit reversal** - a **COMBINED APPROACH!**



Healing Normal Skin Scratching  
Chronic Eczema  
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With this **combined approach** - habit reversal and optimal topical treatment - chronic eczema can heal. Then it is **important** to know how to keep the skin in good shape by dealing **quickly** with eczema flare-ups.

Find out more about habit reversal and atopic eczema at [www.atopicskindisease.com](http://www.atopicskindisease.com)