



Nutritionist **Karen Fischer** tackled her daughter's severe eczema with food and lifestyle changes

# Eating to stop eczema



**A**ya developed eczema at only two weeks of age. Her tiny face was covered in red spots, the creases in her elbows and knees were inflamed and weeping, and the incessant itch made her an unsettled baby. After years of creams and severe elimination diets her mother, Karen Fischer, developed a diet and lifestyle-based solution. This is the anti-eczema program from her book *The Healthy Skin Diet*.

## Why eczema?

Genetics play a major role in whether your child will end up with eczema. In fact, scientists suspect there may be a genetic defect in an enzyme reaction involved in converting omega-6 – found in many nuts, seeds, margarine, vegetable oils, breastmilk and infant formula – into anti-inflammatory substances. When this reaction does not occur, omega-6 is alternatively converted to an acid, called arachidonic acid, which is the building material for leukotrienes, which cause eczema.

This enzyme blockage is not only a genetic problem, it can also be caused by deficiencies in vitamins B6, biotin, and the minerals zinc and magnesium.

Other factors implicated in the appearance of eczema include having an

imbalance in the good and bad bacteria or 'flora' in the gastrointestinal tract. If friendly bacteria are not present in adequate amounts, a proliferation of undesirable microbes occurs. This can hamper your child's digestion and absorption of foods and liquids, and subsequently prevent essential fatty acids, such as omega-3, from being absorbed adequately. Also, without the presence of friendly bacteria, B-group vitamins cannot be manufactured by your child's body. Since omega-3 and B-group vitamins such as biotin, vitamin B3 and B6 are essential for smooth, rash-free skin, these imbalances can increase the risk of eczema.

Salicylates, a natural chemical found in many fruits, vegetables, and food products such as sauces and spreads, can cause flare-ups, and household chemicals and cleaning products such as conventional washing powders and soap can aggravate delicate skin.

## The program

Even if your child's eczema is genetically determined, food and lifestyle changes can make a remarkable difference. The following program consists of six basic steps that work synergistically to heal eczema from the inside out. After

two months on this program, a simple maintenance program can keep your child eczema-free.

## Step 1: Triggers and irritants

The first step is to limit your child's exposure to chemicals. The easiest way to do this is to ventilate your house daily by opening the windows, as household chemicals from furnishings and carpets can build up throughout the day. Use natural products such as baking soda or vinegar and water to clean your house, and wash your child's clothes with sensitive-skin washing powder. Avoid all commercial baby bath and shampoo products containing artificial colours and foaming agents such as sodium lauryl sulfate and sodium laureth sulfate. You can find natural alternatives at your local health food shop.

## Step 2: Identify allergies

When you are starting your baby on solids, introduce one new food every three days to help identify allergies and food sensitivities. If your baby develops red spots around the mouth or increased itchiness, speak to your doctor about allergy testing. If wheezing or swelling occurs, immediately take your child to hospital as this could indicate an anaphylactic reaction.

## Step 3: Topical treatments

Moisturise your child's skin as often as needed, two to four times each day. Look for moisturisers that contain evening primrose oil, blackcurrant seed oil or ▶