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## **Bleach Baths**

Itching, scratching and the immune dysregulation of atopic dermatitis lead to an increased risk of infection from superficial skin flora, especially *Staphylococcus aureus*. One technique that can help decrease the number of infections and possibly reduce the need for antibiotics in patients with eczema is called “Bleach Baths.” Here is simple recommendation from [www.eczemacenter.org](http://www.eczemacenter.org):

### **STEPS:**

1. Start by adding lukewarm water to fill a tub for a normal bath (about 40 gallons).
2. Put 1/4 to 1/2 cup of common liquid bleach (for example, Clorox) into the bath water. Check the bleach bottle to make sure that the concentration of bleach (also known as sodium hypochlorite) is about 6%. This equals 1/2 to 1 ounce of bleach per 10 gallons of water.
3. Completely mix the added bleach in the water. This should create a solution of diluted bleach (about 0.005%), which is just a little stronger than chlorinated swimming pool water.
4. Soak in the chlorinated water for about 10 minutes.
5. Thoroughly rinse the skin clear with lukewarm, fresh water at the end of the bleach bath.
6. As soon as you're finished rinsing off, pat dry. Do not rub dry as this is the same as scratching!
7. Immediately apply any prescribed medication and/or emollients.
8. Repeat bleach baths 2 to 3 times a week or as prescribed by the physician.

### **The following restrictions may apply:**

Do not use undiluted bleach directly on the skin. Even diluted bleach baths can potentially cause dryness and/or irritation.

Do not use bleach baths if there are many breaks or open areas in the skin (for fear of intense stinging and burning)

Do not use bleach baths in patients with a known contact allergy to chlorine

## **Bleach baths may help kids with eczema**

Study shows baths with diluted bleach help treat the itchy, painful skin condition

By [Salynn Boyles](#)

WebMD Health News

Reviewed by Dr. Rob Hicks

27 April, 2009 – Participating in a clinical trial in 2006 changed 7-year-old Ben Kieffer's life.

Ben had suffered from severe eczema since he was 5 weeks old, with relentless itchy, painful flares of the skin condition. He also took many courses of antibiotics to treat related infections.

‘His calves were covered in scales and his hands would crack and swell with infection’, Jennifer Kieffer tells WebMD. ‘It was really tough for him, but we saw a big change almost immediately after he joined the study.’

The trial was carried out by researchers at Northwestern University, in Chicago. Ben's improvement was remarkable, but, even more remarkable is the fact that the treatment he received was not a high-tech, expensive new drug or topical cream.

In fact, it's about as low tech and inexpensive, as you can get. When his eczema flared up, Ben soaked daily in bath water containing about 60ml of household bleach.

He still takes frequent bleach baths, even though his eczema is much better. His mum says the baths have made all the difference. And is impressed that such an improvement costs only a few pence.

According to the National Eczema Society, UK, as many as one in five school-aged children have eczema, known medically as atopic eczema. The skin condition is characterised by itchy, inflamed skin that often becomes scabby and raw from scratching.

Many experts believe that frequent scratching, which breaks the skin, makes eczema sufferers more susceptible to skin infections, including difficult to treat ones like methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

Paediatric dermatologist, Dr Amy Paller, led the trial – alongside Dr Jennifer Huang and colleagues – and claims that about 90% of people with eczema have staphylococcus on their skin, compared to only about 25% of people who don't get eczema.

Staphylococcus infections have traditionally been treated with antibiotics, but bleach baths can also kill the microbes that cause infection.

Paller now recommends bleach baths to all her patients with moderate to severe eczema.

This is the first time researchers have conducted a formal study to examine the treatment.

Thirty-one children between the ages of 6 months and 17 years, including Ben Kieffer, were included in the study. All had moderate to severe eczema and were also infected with staphylococcus. They were all were being treated with a 14-day course of antibiotics.

In addition to the drug treatment, half of the children took bleach baths and the other half took ‘placebo’ baths without bleach.

For the purposes of the study, children took bleach or placebo baths twice a week, but Paller says more frequent baths may be useful during eczema flare-ups.

**After three months, the reduction in eczema symptoms among the children who took the bleach baths was five times greater than in those children who took the placebo baths. The results were so dramatic that researchers stopped the three-month study early so that all the children could benefit from the bleach baths.**

During the study, children who were randomly assigned to the bleach-bath group also dabbed a topical antibiotic up their nose (where staphylococcus bacteria often harbour). But Paller says she has many patients who don't use this intervention and still improve with bleach baths.

The study appears in the May issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.

‘This is not going to be a cure for everybody’, says Paller. ‘But there is certainly a subset of patients who will benefit tremendously.’

### **Bleach for community-acquired MRSA?**

Dermatologist Dr Cheryl Lee Eberting, based in Alpine, Utah, is another leading eczema expert who is also a big believer in bleach baths.

She recommends them for her patients with eczema and also claims that bleach baths may have a wider application in protecting people generally from community-acquired MRSA.

While most MRSA infections still occur in hospital environments, community-acquired infections of drug-resistant staphylococcus are on the increase. For example, staphylococcus bacteria breakouts have also been traced to gyms and locker rooms.

‘If you play a contact sport or work out at the health club a lot’, says Eberting. ‘It probably wouldn't hurt to take an occasional bleach bath.’ But, talk to your doctor before doing so.