

Emollient application from birth to prevent eczema in high-risk children: the BEEP RCT

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Eczema is a troublesome itchy skin condition affecting 1 in 5 children and 1 in 10 UK adults. There is no cure and affected children are more likely to develop food allergies. We wanted to see if we could prevent eczema by protecting the skin of babies at higher risk of developing eczema (with an immediate relative with eczema, asthma or hay fever) with moisturisers used to treat dry skin. Previous research suggested that protecting the skin barrier might also prevent food allergy. One thousand three hundred and ninety-four families took part in a study; half of them were asked to apply moisturiser every day to their newborn baby for the first year and half to look after their baby's skin in the normal way. At the age of 2 years, we did not see any difference in how common eczema was between the two groups: 23% had eczema in the moisturiser group and 25% in the normal care group. It did not matter how we defined eczema – whether examined by a researcher or parent report. We did not find any differences in related conditions like asthma or hay fever either. We found that children using moisturisers had seen their doctor slightly more often for mild skin infections. There was a hint that food allergy might have been increased in the moisturiser group, but there was not enough data to be sure. We followed up the children to age 5 years, but we still did not find any benefits from using moisturisers in early life. Since this study, other similar research has been done using newer types of moisturisers, but their results are the same. This study shows that using daily moisturisers on healthy babies with a high risk of eczema does not prevent eczema. It is one less thing for busy families to worry about.

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