

Moisturising newborns prevents allergies: Japan study

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Applying moisturiser to a newborn baby's skin could help prevent eczema and even food allergies in later life, possibly offering a cheap and easy way to combat a growing global problem, a Japanese institute said Friday.

A small-scale study carried out by researchers at the Tokyo-based National Center for Child Health and Development suggests regular lotion in the first few weeks of life helps keep a baby's immune system intact.

Scientists divided 118 newborns into two groups of 59 each, applying an emollient—a glycerine-based over-the-counter moisturiser—to one group of babies for 32 weeks and no treatment to the other group.

As a result, 19 in the intervention group developed [atopic dermatitis](#)—[eczema](#)—against 28 in the control group.

The study, which the researchers said was a global first, tentatively shows moisturising reduces the risk of developing eczema 30 percent.

The institute said in a release that emollient prevents skin from drying out and cracking, which exposes immune cells and allows irritants to get in.

This, in turn, boosts the body's production of antibodies to combat the irritant, resulting in over-production.

It is this over-production of antibodies that produces the symptoms of an allergy.

The institute said babies suffering from eczema tend to display strong reactions to egg white, and thus can go on to be allergic to eggs in later life or to developing other problems such as asthma or sinus infections.

"It was known before that dry skin would cause eczema. One of the achievements of this study is that we came up with clear figures for the probability of developing eczema," the centre's spokesman Toru Sato told AFP on Friday.

"Researchers are now looking at why some babies in the group still went on to develop eczema," he said.

"Another important point is that the study suggests atopic [skin](#) problems could be linked to other [allergic reactions](#) such as asthma and hay fever that may appear later in life."

Research on allergies has often focused on preventing maternal intake of certain substances to reduce transmission to the foetus.

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