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Title: Guidelines of care for the primary prevention of atopic dermatitis and awareness of comorbid conditions in pediatric atopic dermatitis

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Abstract

Background: Pediatric atopic dermatitis (AD) is a common, chronic inflammatory skin disorder that significantly impacts the quality of life of affected children and their families. In addition to skin-related symptoms, AD in pediatric patients may be associated with a range of comorbid conditions

Objective: To provide evidence-based recommendations on primary prevention of AD and to appraise evidence of the association between AD and comorbidities among pediatric patients.

Methods: A multidisciplinary workgroup conducted a systematic review and applied the GRADE approach for assessing the certainty of evidence and formulating and grading recommendations.

Results: The workgroup developed 14 evidence-based recommendations on primary prevention of AD and 29 statements on the association between pediatric AD and comorbid conditions.

Limitations: This analysis is based on the best available evidence at the time it was conducted. This guideline does not make recommendations for screening or management of comorbidities in children with AD.

Conclusions: We make a conditional recommendation for moisturizing skin care to reduce the occurrence of AD and conditional recommendations against early food introduction, human milk consumption, and probiotic or vitamin D supplementation for the primary prevention of AD. Clinicians should be aware of comorbidities associated with pediatric AD, but further research is needed to optimize screening and/or management of comorbidities.

132 **Abbreviations Used**

133

134 AA: Alopecia areata

135 AAD: American Academy of Dermatology

136 AC: Allergic conjunctivitis

137 AD: Atopic dermatitis

138 ADHD: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

139 AE: Adverse event

140 AR: Allergic rhinitis

141 ASD: Autism spectrum disorder

142 CDLQI: Children's Dermatology Life Quality Index

143 CI: Confidence interval

144 EASI: Eczema Area and Severity Index

145 EoE: Eosinophilic esophagitis

146 FA: food allergies

147 FDA: Food and Drug Administration

148 HR: Hazard ratio

149 IGA: Investigator Global Assessment

150 MD: Mean difference

151 OR: Odds ratio

152 POEM: Patient Oriented Eczema Measure

153 QoL: Quality of life

154 RCT: Randomized controlled trial

155 RR: Risk ratio

156 SAE: Serious adverse event

157 SCORAD: Scoring of Atopic Dermatitis

Scope and Objectives

Atopic dermatitis (AD) is a chronic inflammatory skin condition affecting 10 to 20% of children worldwide.¹⁻⁴ It often begins in infancy and is associated with appreciable morbidity and healthcare burden. In addition to skin-related symptoms, AD in pediatric patients may be associated with a range of comorbidities, including allergic rhinitis, asthma, food allergies, and mental health disorders. The objective of these guidelines is twofold: (1) to provide evidence-based recommendations for the primary prevention of AD, and (2) to present evidence-informed statements on the associations between AD and pediatric comorbidities. These guidelines aim to support healthcare professionals, caregivers, and policymakers in implementing preventive measures and in understanding the broader health implications of pediatric AD. Children under 18 years of age with AD of any severity in any healthcare setting or context are the target population of these guidelines. Importantly, these guidelines do not make recommendations for screening or management of comorbidities in adults with AD.

Methods

A multidisciplinary workgroup developed these guidelines using a systematic evidence review process, which included (i) identifying and prioritizing clinical questions and outcomes (**Table I**), (ii) systematic retrieval and assessment of evidence, and (iii) assessment of the certainty of the evidence and formulation of recommendations or statements of association using GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation) (**Tables II & III**).

Table I. Clinical questions and scope

Clinical Questions	
1. How do infant-focused skin care, dietary, microbiome, environmental, and other interventions affect the risk of developing AD, and do primary AD prevention interventions cause undesirable effects?	
2. Are the following comorbidities associated with AD in children and adolescents: mental and behavioral health disorders, allergic conditions, skin infections, asthma, lifestyle choices, alopecia areata, bone fractures, osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome?	
Outcomes of interest	
Primary Prevention	Incidence, occurrence, or rate of AD at 6 months to 3 years of age
	Serious adverse events (as defined by studies)
	Adverse events of interest (specific to each intervention defined a priori)
Comorbidities	Incidence of select comorbid conditions
	Prevalence of select comorbid conditions
Scope for prevention	
Characteristic	Inclusion Criteria
Population	Healthy full-term (≤ 37 weeks' gestation) infants ≤ 12 months without pre-existing atopic dermatitis from high-risk or general populations
Intervention	Infant-directed interventions intended to prevent development of AD. Including skincare, environmental, dietary, microbiome, and other interventions
Study Design	Published RCTs
Scope for comorbidities	
Characteristic	Inclusion Criteria
Population	Children and adolescents (<18 years old) with clinically diagnosed AD of any severity
Exposure	Diagnosis of atopic dermatitis
Study Design	Non-randomized studies (cohort, case-control, cross-sectional)

Specific to the clinical question addressing the association between pediatric AD and comorbid conditions, the GRADE for prognosis approach was used to assess the overall certainty of the evidence for each outcome.^{5, 6} The GRADEPro Guideline Development Tool was used to create evidence profiles that categorized the overall quality of the body of evidence for each outcome into one of four categories: high, moderate, low, or very low. Each category represents the confidence in the estimate of effect for an outcome (**Table III**).

196 **Table II. Strength of recommendation and certainty of evidence for primary prevention**
 197 **recommendations**

Strength of Recommendation	Wording	Implication ⁷⁻⁹
<i>Strong recommendation for the use of an intervention</i>	"We recommend..."	Benefits clearly outweigh risks and burdens; recommendation applies to most patients in most circumstances.
<i>Strong recommendation against the use of an intervention</i>	"We recommend against..."	Risk and burden clearly outweigh benefits; the recommendation applies to most patients in most circumstances.
<i>Good Practice Statement</i>	"We recommend..."	Guidance was viewed by the Work Group as imperative to clinical practice and developed when the supporting evidence was considerable but indirect, and the certainty surrounding an intervention's impact was high with the benefits clearly outweighing the harms (or vice versa). Good Practice Statements are strong recommendations as the certainty surrounding the impact of the recommended intervention is high. Implementation of these strong recommendations is considered to clearly result in beneficial outcomes. ⁹
<i>Conditional recommendation for the use of an intervention</i>	"Evidence suggests benefit..."	Benefits are closely balanced with risks and burdens; recommendation applies to most patients, but the most appropriate action may differ depending on the patient or other stakeholder values.
<i>Conditional recommendation against the use of an intervention</i>	"Evidence suggests no benefit..."	Risks and burden closely balanced with benefits; recommendation applies to most patients, but the most appropriate action may differ depending on the patient or other stakeholder values
<i>Insufficient evidence statement</i>	"There is insufficient evidence to recommend..."	The available evidence is inadequate to make a reliable determination about the effectiveness or lack thereof of an intervention
Certainty of Evidence	Wording	Implication ^{7, 8}
High	"high certainty evidence"	Very confident that the true effect lies close to that of the estimate of the effect.
Moderate	"moderate certainty evidence"	Moderately confident in the effect estimate; the true effect is likely to be close to the estimate of the effect, but there is a possibility that it is substantially different.
Low	"low certainty evidence"	Confidence in the effect estimate is limited; the true effect may be substantially different from the estimate of the effect
Very Low	"very low certainty evidence"	The estimate of effect is very uncertain; the true effect may be substantially different from the estimate of effect

198

199 **Table III . Strength of statements of association and supporting evidence: Wording &**
 200 **implications**

Statement Wording	Overall certainty of Supporting Evidence	Implication
Is associated	High or Moderate	Clear evidence of an important large effect
Is not associated	High or Moderate	Clear evidence of no association
Probably associated	High or Moderate	Evidence of a moderate effect
Probably not associated	High or Moderate	Evidence of small or unimportant effect
May be associated	Low	Evidence of a large, moderate, or small effect based on low quality evidence.
May not be associated	Low	Evidence of no association based on low quality evidence.
Uncertain association	Any Quality	Evidence of any magnitude of effect from very low quality evidence or imprecise or inconsistent effect estimates from evidence of any quality.
Strength of Evidence	Wording	Implication ⁶⁻⁸
High	"high quality evidence"	Very confident that the true magnitude of association lies close to that of the estimate.
Moderate	"moderate quality evidence"	Moderately confident in the estimate of association, but there is a possibility that it is substantially different.

Low	"low quality evidence"	Confidence in the estimate is limited; the true magnitude of association may be substantially different from the estimate.
Very Low	"very low quality evidence"	The estimate is very uncertain; the true magnitude of association may be substantially different from the estimate.

201

202 For detailed methodology, see [Supplemental Appendix 1](#).

203

204

205 **Definition**

206

207 AD, also known as atopic eczema, is a chronic, pruritic inflammatory skin disease that occurs

208 with highest prevalence in children. It follows a relapsing course. AD is often associated with a

209 personal or family history of atopy.

210

211 **PRIMARY PREVENTION**

212 A range of interventions from skin care to nutritional modifications were explored for their

213 potential for primary prevention of AD. This section of the guideline evaluates the data on infant-

214 focused primary AD prevention interventions to support evidence-based clinical practice

215 recommendations (**Table IV**).216 **Table IV. Recommendations for primary AD prevention interventions**

Statement	Strength	Certainty of Evidence	Evidence
Skincare interventions			
Evidence suggests regular use of moisturizing skin care before the age of 2 years in children at risk for atopic dermatitis may reduce the risk of developing atopic dermatitis. <i>Remark:</i> The evidence does not support a protective benefit with the use of moisturizing skincare in the general population.	Conditional	Low	10-23
Environmental interventions (water softening, allergen avoidance)			
There is insufficient evidence to recommend water softening or dust mite avoidance interventions before the age of 2 years in children at risk of developing atopic dermatitis.	NA	Very low	24-26
Dietary interventions			
Evidence suggests no benefit to early food introduction for the prevention AD.	Conditional	Very low	20, 27

Evidence suggests no benefit of the consumption of human milk for the prevention of AD.	Conditional	Very low	28
Evidence suggests no benefit from probiotic supplementation for the prevention of AD.	Conditional	Low	29-37
Evidence suggests no benefit from vitamin D supplementation for the prevention of AD.	Conditional	Low	38
There is insufficient evidence to recommend prebiotic supplementation for the prevention of AD.	NA	Very low	39-42
There is insufficient evidence to recommend synbiotic supplementation for the prevention of AD.	NA	Low	43
There is insufficient evidence to recommend the consumption of goat milk for the prevention of AD.	NA	Very low	44, 45
There is insufficient evidence to recommend fatty acid supplementation for the prevention of AD.	NA	Very low	25, 46-48
There is insufficient evidence to recommend an enriched formula for the prevention of AD.	NA	Low	49
There is insufficient evidence to recommend partially hydrolyzed whey formula for the prevention of AD.	NA	Very low	50-58
There is insufficient evidence to recommend the short-term early consumption of hydrolyzed formula.	NA	Very low	53
There is insufficient evidence to recommend soy formula for the prevention of AD.	NA	Low	51, 54

217

218 *Skin care interventions*

219 Regular use of moisturizing skin care before 2 years of age in children at risk for AD may reduce
 220 the development of AD,^{10-12, 14-19, 21-23} (**Supplemental Table 1**). There is great heterogeneity
 221 among applicable studies, in terms of age at intervention, duration of intervention, washout
 222 periods, age at assessment, intervention composition timing and frequency, and comparator
 223 group. The evidence does not support a protective benefit with the use of moisturizing skin care
 224 in the general population.^{13, 20} However, providers should educate caregivers about the potential
 225 for exposure to allergens in personal care products, though adverse events (AEs) with regular
 226 moisturizing skin care appears rare and comparable to standard care.^{12-14, 19, 22}

227

228 *Environmental interventions*

229 There is insufficient evidence to recommend dust mite avoidance interventions before the age of
 230 2 years in children at risk of developing AD (**Supplemental Table 2**).²⁴ Due to the underpowered

sample in the study by Jabbar-Lopez et al, there is also insufficient evidence to recommend water-softening interventions before the age of 2 years in children at risk of developing AD ([Supplemental Table 3](#)).²⁶

Dietary interventions

Available evidence suggests no benefit to early complementary feeding for the prevention of AD ([Supplemental Table 4](#)).^{20, 27} Although early food introduction may reduce the risk of food allergy, it does not alter the occurrence or severity of AD.^{59, 60}

Available evidence suggests no benefit from human milk consumption,²⁸ probiotic supplementation,^{29, 31-33, 35-37} or vitamin D supplementation³⁸ for the prevention of AD ([Supplemental Tables 5-7](#)). Furthermore, due to limited, underpowered data, there is insufficient evidence to recommend prebiotic supplementation,^{39, 40, 42} synbiotic (combined probiotic and prebiotic) supplementation,⁴³ goat milk consumption (note, it may cause gastrointestinal distress and iron-deficiency anemia),^{44, 45} fatty acid supplementation,^{46-48, 61} enriched formula,⁴⁹ partially hydrolyzed whey formula,⁵⁰⁻⁵⁸ short-term early consumption of hydrolyzed formula,⁵³ or soy formula^{51, 54} for the prevention of AD ([Supplemental Tables 8-15](#)).

COMORBIDITIES

AD detrimentally impacts quality of life (QoL) and overall health, increasing health care utilization.^{62, 63} Comorbidities further increase the individual- and population-level burdens of AD, and AD in children is associated with a wide variety of systemic comorbidities, particularly atopic and allergic conditions ([Table III](#)). This section of the guidelines appraises the evidence

of the association between pediatric AD and comorbid conditions to increase awareness and understanding of AD and its potential associations with the aim of helping providers deliver more holistic care and prevent long-term health consequences and reductions in QoL for these patients.

Table III. Pediatric AD comorbidities statements of association

Statement of Association	Certainty of Evidence	Evidence
<i>Atopic & Allergic Conditions</i>		
The association between AD in children and allergic conjunctivitis is uncertain.	Low	64-66
AD in children is associated with allergic rhinitis.	Moderate	64, 65, 67-93
AD in children is associated with eosinophilic esophagitis.	High	65, 70, 85, 94-99
AD in children is associated with food allergies. <i>Remark: The majority of studies used strict definitions of IgE-mediated food allergy (including symptoms plus evidence of allergic sensitization and/or oral food challenge).</i>	Moderate	65, 70, 78, 80, 82, 83, 88, 92, 100-140
Greater AD severity in children may be associated with increasing food allergy prevalence	Low	80, 117, 120, 127, 136
AD in children is associated with asthma	Moderate	65, 67-70, 73, 75, 76, 78, 80, 82-85, 87-92, 117, 119, 125, 132, 136, 141-174
Greater AD severity in children may be associated with increasing asthma prevalence	Moderate	68, 90, 136
<i>Immune-mediated Conditions</i>		
AD in children may be associated with alopecia areata.	Low	70, 76, 82, 175-181
AD in children is associated with urticaria	Moderate	66, 68, 70, 75, 76, 80, 82, 85, 182-187
<i>Mental Health & Substance Use</i>		
AD in children is probably associated with anxiety	Moderate	64, 65, 68-70, 82, 83, 90, 188-193
The association between AD in children and depression is uncertain	Very low	64, 68, 69, 76, 82, 90, 188, 190-194
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with suicide	Moderate	64, 90, 195-198
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with drinking alcohol	Moderate	199-203
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with cigarette smoking	Moderate	199-201, 204-206
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with illicit drug use	Moderate	69, 199
<i>ADHD & Autism Spectrum Disorders</i>		
AD in children is associated with ADHD	Moderate	64, 65, 69, 70, 82, 83, 90, 188, 190, 192, 207-225
The association between AD in children and autism spectrum disorder is uncertain	Low	64, 82, 83, 90, 188, 190, 210, 211, 220, 221, 226-229
<i>Cardiovascular Diseases</i>		
AD in children may be associated with hypertension <i>Remark: The evidence suggests a small magnitude of association between AD and hypertension in children.</i>	Low	69, 70, 76, 230, 231

The association between AD in children and ischemic heart disease is uncertain.	Low	69, 76
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with peripheral vascular disease.	Moderate	69
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with cardiac arrhythmia.	Moderate	69, 82
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with congestive heart failure.	Moderate	69
Metabolic Disorders		
AD in children is probably associated with obesity	Moderate	69, 70, 76, 144, 230, 232-242
AD in children may be associated with metabolic syndrome	Moderate	70, 242
AD in children may <i>not</i> be associated with dyslipidemia	Low	69, 70, 76, 230, 236
AD in children is probably <i>not</i> associated with diabetes	Moderate	69, 70, 76, 230, 237
Bone Health		
The association between AD in children and fractures is uncertain	Low	70, 82, 243, 244
AD in children may <i>not</i> be associated with osteoporosis	Low	69
Skin Infection		
AD in children is associated with bacterial, viral, and fungal skin infections	Moderate	66, 68, 70, 152, 231, 245-254

Allergic conditions

Allergic Conjunctivitis

The association between AD in children and allergic conjunctivitis (AC) is uncertain, due to the absence of consistent evidence, with estimates varying widely across the available studies (**Supplemental Table 16**). Pooled prevalence of AC in children with AD over 3 studies (n = 41,169) was 10.2% (0, 22.0),⁶⁴⁻⁶⁶ and one study found higher adjusted odds of AC in children with AD compared to those without AD (adjusted Odds Ratio[aOR] 1.99 [95% Confidence Interval[CI] 1.59, 2.49]).⁶⁶

Allergic Rhinitis

Allergic rhinitis is a recognized common comorbidity of AD, and our systematic review found moderate certainty evidence that AD in children is associated with AR (**Supplemental Table 17**). It is important to note that several studies used in the analysis had high risk for bias and relied on unvalidated exposure and/or outcome assessments. In a pooled analysis of 5 studies,^{67, 69, 70, 72, 75} children with AD, compared to those without AD, had a high aOR of AR (3.59 [95%CI: 2.19,

5.88]). Furthermore, the association and prevalence of AR may be higher in children with more severe AD.^{68, 90} Additionally, in a pooled analysis of 8 studies,^{77, 78, 81, 82, 85-87, 89, 91} children with AD, compared to those without AD, had higher odds of a subsequent diagnosis of AR (aOR 2.20 [95% CI 1.88, 2.59]).

Eosinophilic Esophagitis

The available evidence suggests AD in children is associated with eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE) (**Supplemental Table 18**). Evaluating 6 studies, the pooled prevalence of AD in children with EoE was 21.8% (95% CI 7.8, 35.8).^{65, 94-96, 98, 99} A retrospective analysis of health care claims data suggested higher odds of EoE in children with AD compared to those without AD,⁷⁰ while two other studies demonstrated an increased risk of EoE in children with AD.^{85, 97}

Food Allergies

Most studies in our systematic review used strict definitions of IgE-mediated food allergies (FA) (including symptoms plus evidence of allergic sensitization and/or oral food challenge) to distinguish food allergy from allergic sensitization to food. With moderate certainty, we concluded that AD in children is associated with FA (**Supplemental Table 19**). Including 18 studies (n = 682,736), of both caregiver-reported and clinically-confirmed FA, the pooled prevalence of FA in children with AD is 23.6% (95% CI 21.7, 25.4).^{65, 80, 83, 88, 104, 110, 113, 116, 118-120, 122, 125-127, 129, 131, 132} Furthermore, five studies described increasing FA prevalence with increasing AD severity,^{80, 88, 120, 127, 136} while two did not.^{126, 129} Examining the association between FA and AD demonstrated similar findings – the pooled analysis of six studies found children with AD, compared to those without AD, had higher adjusted odds of FA (aOR 6.53 [95% CI 3.89,

10.96)]^{70, 100, 101, 105, 110, 113}, and Mailhol et al. found an association with FA and AD severity in a cohort of 386 children with AD.¹⁰⁴ The association with AD in children and specific FA (i.e., eggs, peanut, cow's milk) is less clear with limited data. Moreover, while studies are limited, children with AD may have higher odds of subsequent diagnosis of FA. While there are many studies examining the link between AD in children and FA, several relied on unvalidated and/or self-reported exposure and/or outcome assessments so are of a high risk of bias.

Asthma

Atopic dermatitis in children is associated with asthma. ([Supplemental Table 20](#)). In the pooled adjusted analysis of nine studies, children with AD had higher odds of asthma [aOR 3.03 (95% CI 2.30, 4.01)],^{69, 70, 73, 75, 141, 142, 146, 151, 152}. The pooled unadjusted analysis of 5 additional studies demonstrated similar results.^{76, 90, 148, 149, 153} Several studies demonstrate children with a prior diagnosis of AD have higher odds and higher risk of a subsequent diagnosis of asthma.^{67, 78, 82, 85, 87, 89, 91, 156, 159, 163, 164, 170, 173}

The pooled prevalence of asthma in children with AD (n = 955, 098) is 21.4% (95% CI 19.6, 23.1).^{65, 69, 75, 76, 78, 80, 82-85, 88, 90, 91, 117, 119, 125, 132, 146, 148, 149, 151, 153, 155, 157, 160-162, 166-169, 171, 172} There is evidence that asthma prevalence increases by AD severity. Gerner et al. reported increasing asthma prevalence in children with clear/almost clear, mild, moderate and severe AD: 22.9%, 26.5%, 35.7%, and 35.7%, respectively.⁶⁸ Prevalence estimates varied widely across studies, in part related to variability by geography.

Immune-mediated Conditions

Alopecia areata

Evidence of the association between AD in children and AA is of low certainty ([Supplemental Table 21](#)). In the pooled analysis of two studies, children with AD, compared to those without, have higher unadjusted odds of AA (OR 3.17 [95% CI 1.71, 5.86]).^{70, 76} There are few studies examining this association, which generally rely on unvalidated or self-reported exposure and outcome assessments, with high risk of bias.

Urticaria

AD in children is associated with urticaria ([Supplemental Table 22](#)). The pooled prevalence of urticaria in children with AD (n = 54,360) is 9.5% (95% CI 7.2, 11.8),^{66, 68, 75, 76, 80, 182} and a pooled analysis of three studies suggests higher adjusted odds of urticaria in children with AD compared to those without [aOR 2.98 (95% CI 2.84, 3.14)].^{66, 70, 75} Furthermore, a pooled analysis of two studies suggests an increased risk of subsequent urticaria in children with AD [adjusted Hazard Ratio[aHR] of 1.76 (95% CI 1.42, 2.18)];^{82, 85} Kitsioulis et al. also found higher odds of subsequent AD in children with chronic urticaria, suggesting the relationship may be bidirectional.¹⁸⁶

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

The pooled prevalence of ADHD in children with AD (n = 158,832) is 8.2% (95% CI 6.4, 10.0),^{64, 65, 69, 83, 209-211, 214-216, 219, 224} but prevalence rates varied widely across studies ranging from 1.2% to 23.7%; this may be secondary to various measures used to assess outcomes across studies ([Supplemental Table 23](#)). The pooled analysis of nine studies examining the association between ADHD and AD demonstrated children with AD, compared to those without AD, have

higher odds of ADHD (aOR 1.43 [95% CI 1.26, 1.63]).^{69, 70, 188, 190, 209-212, 214} Studies examining the occurrence of ADHD in early onset AD (under 4 years of age) and AD in general were mixed – some suggest an association with early onset AD and AD in general^{218, 220-223} while others do not,^{82, 90, 217, 219} and some suggest a greater association with more severe AD cases,¹⁹² while others do not.⁹⁰

Autism spectrum disorder

The association between AD in children and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is uncertain (**Supplemental Table 24**). This was due to low certainty of evidence and conflicting results across studies, as well as a small magnitude of association. In a pooled analysis of four studies, children with AD, compared to those without AD, had higher odds of ASD (aOR 2.12[95%CI 1.35, 3.33]).^{188, 190, 210, 211} Conversely, a pooled analysis of two studies found ASD in children was not associated with AD (aOR 1.27 [95%CI 0.90, 1.79]).^{208, 227} Prevalence rates of ASD in children with AD varied widely across studies, and rates were both lower and greater than expected rates.^{64, 83, 190, 211, 226, 227, 229} Additionally, Wan et al. did not find severity of AD to be associated with increased risk of subsequent ASD diagnosis.⁹⁰

Mental health and substance use

Substance use

While it is important for all providers to look for signs of substance use in their pediatric patients, AD in children is probably not associated with drinking alcohol, cigarette smoking, or illicit drug use based on available data (**Supplemental Tables 25-27**).^{69, 199-202, 204-206}

Nonetheless, age is an important consideration as adolescents with AD may be more likely to engage in substance use than younger children.

Mental health

Although AD in children is probably associated with anxiety, the association between pediatric AD and depression is uncertain ([Supplemental Tables 28-29](#)). In the pooled analysis of four studies, children with AD, compared to those without, have increased odds of anxiety [aOR 1.33 (95% CI 1.14, 1.57)],^{69, 70, 189, 190} and a study by Yaghmaie et al. found increasing odds of anxiety with increasing AD severity as reported by caregivers [mild AD aOR 1.44 (95% CI 1.01, 2.05), moderate AD aOR 2.18 (95% CI 1.47, 3.23), severe AD aOR 2.81 (95% CI 1.28, 6.17)].¹⁹⁰

Alternatively, the pooled analysis of two studies suggests no association between AD and a diagnosis of depression [aOR 1.45 (95% CI 0.77, 2.73)].^{69, 190} However, Yaghmaie et al. suggested the frequency of depression in children with AD increased with increasing AD severity as reported by caregivers (mild AD 5.4%, moderate AD 7.2%, severe AD 14.1%), and increasing self-reported AD severity may be associated with increased odds of depression.¹⁹⁰

Atopic dermatitis in children is probably not associated with suicide, though the data are limited and mixed. Some studies suggest suicide and suicidal ideation/attempts are not associated with AD,⁹⁰ while the pooled analysis of two studies suggests children with AD, compared to those without AD, have higher adjusted odds of suicidal ideation [aOR 1.15 (95% CI 1.02, 1.30)]

([Supplemental Table 30](#)).^{197, 198} As with substance abuse above, age is an important consideration as adolescent patients may be more likely to present with anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation than their younger counterparts.

Metabolic disorders

Obesity

AD in children is probably associated with obesity with the pooled analysis of nine studies demonstrating children with AD had higher adjusted odds of obesity than did controls without AD [aOR 1.35 (95% CI 1.15, 1.58)] ([Supplemental Table 31](#)).^{69, 70, 144, 230, 232, 234, 236, 238, 242} The pooled unadjusted analysis of five studies also suggests higher odds of obesity in children with AD.^{76, 233, 238-240} One study suggests the odds of obesity are higher in children with moderate-to-severe AD compared to children with mild AD [aOR 2.59 (95% CI 1.64, 4.10)].²³⁸

Dyslipidemia

Atopic dermatitis in children may not be associated with dyslipidemia based on available evidence ([Supplemental Table 32](#)). A study of 30,354 patients reports the prevalence of hyperlipidemia in children with AD is 0.71%.⁷⁶ Two studies suggest dyslipidemia is not associated with AD in children: one study found hypercholesterolemia is not associated with AD, while two other studies suggested increased odds of hyperlipidemia in children with AD.^{69, 70, 76, 236}

Diabetes and metabolic syndrome

There are few studies examining the association between AD in children and diabetes. The available data are limited and mixed, suggesting AD in children is probably not associated with diabetes ([Supplemental Table 33](#)). Included studies varied in assessment and definition of diabetes and most do not distinguish between type 1 and type 2 diabetes. A retrospective analysis of 86,969 pediatric patients with AD and 116,564 matched controls, demonstrated the odds of

metabolic syndrome may be increased in children with AD [aOR 1.61 (95% CI 1.28, 2.01)]
([Supplemental Table 34](#)). An additional body of literature suggests an inverse association
between AD and type I diabetes.²⁵⁵⁻²⁵⁸

Cardiovascular disease

AD in children may be associated with hypertension (small magnitude), though the evidence is
limited ([Supplemental Table 35](#)). This association may be multifactorial and influenced by
lifestyle factors (e.g. obesity, diet, physical activity). In the pooled analysis of three studies,
children with AD, compared to those without AD, had higher adjusted odds of hypertension
(aOR 1.20 [95% CI 1.03, 1.39]),^{69, 70, 230} but an unadjusted analysis reported no association.⁷⁶
The association between AD in children and ischemic heart disease is uncertain – an adjusted
analysis reported no association between AD and ischemic heart disease,⁶⁹ but an unadjusted
analysis reported higher odds of ischemic heart disease in children with AD.⁷⁶ Additionally, our
analysis showed no association between AD and peripheral vascular disease, cardiac arrhythmia,
and congestive heart failure.

Fractures and Osteoporosis

One study found no association between pathologic fracture and AD,⁷⁰ while another suggested
AD is associated with a small increase in the risk of any bone fracture [adjusted Risk Ratio (RR)
1.08 (95% CI 1.05, 1.10)]([Supplemental Tables 36-37](#)).²⁴³ Similarly, a pooled estimate from two
studies suggests a small increase in the subsequent risk of fracture in children with AD compared
to those without AD; furthermore, the risk of fracture increased with increasing AD severity
[mild AD: aHR 1.12 (95% CI 1.11, 1.14) versus moderate-to-severe: aHR 1.23 (95% CI 1.20,

1.26)].^{82, 244} Only one study met inclusion criteria regarding osteoporosis, with wide confidence intervals precluding conclusions about an association with AD [aOR 2.15 (95% CI 0.78, 5.92)].

Skin infections

It is well known that AD predisposes to skin infections ([Supplemental Tables 38-41](#)). Ren and Silverberg reported higher odds of skin infections in children with AD compared to those without AD [aOR 2.23 (95% CI 2.16, 2.31) $p < 0.0001$] and Narla and Silverberg, using multivariable models to control for age, race, sex and insurance status, reported AD was associated with cutaneous infections.^{245, 246} This association between pediatric AD and skin infection includes: 1) bacterial infections (bacterial impetigo,^{66, 70, 250} bacterial cellulitis,⁷⁰ and *S. aureus* skin infection²⁴⁹), 2) viral infections (molluscum contagiosum infections,^{66, 70, 250} warts,^{66, 70, 152, 250} coxsackie viral infection,⁷⁰ and herpes simplex infection²⁵⁰), and 3) fungal infections.^{66, 70, 250}

Gaps in Research

While genetic factors may predispose a child to AD, early exposures and environmental factors likely contribute to pathogenesis. More studies on AD prevention will be useful – the ability to reduce the incidence of AD would be very impactful; we know that the disease is difficult to manage for patients and their caregivers and can affect their ability to perform well in school and adapt socially.

Larger studies examining associations, particularly as they relate to the severity of AD and more data about the association of AD with mental disorders, autism, and ADHD could help providers target these patients earlier and make appropriate referrals. Additionally, these guidelines do not make recommendations for screening or management of comorbidities in children with AD.

Rather, the evidence for the association between pediatric AD and comorbid conditions, including allergic conditions, alopecia areata (AA), attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), cardiovascular disease, and fractures among others, was evaluated with the aim of improving awareness and understanding among dermatologists and other clinicians.

Conclusions

These guidelines provide evidence-based recommendations for the primary prevention of AD in favor of regular use of moisturizer and to date insufficient evidence or no benefit to environmental or dietary interventions. There are also associations between pediatric AD and other atopic and allergic conditions, immune mediated conditions such as urticaria, anxiety, ADH, skin infection, and some metabolic disorders.

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