

# IN A SPIN: washday wisdom

Getting your family's washing clean can be a minefield when you add eczema into the equation. Here, **Claire Moulds** looks at ways to take the pain out of doing laundry.

Everyone knows that when you're not feeling 100% putting on fresh, clean clothes makes you feel that little bit better, so it's only natural when your skin is not at its best to crave the comfort of newly laundered sheets and garments.

Add in the sticky residue left on fabric by some creams and ointments and the knowledge that sore, open skin is prone to infection and it's therefore no surprise that those with eczema and their families find themselves bonding very closely with their washing machine.

And yet, while on the surface clean laundry sounds like an obvious way to help stay healthy, detergents, stain removers and fabric softeners can all unleash an onslaught of potential triggers – a situation made worse by the fact that the material that has been washed in them is then in direct contact with our bare skin.

## Rinse and repeat

It may sound obvious but adding an extra rinse cycle to your wash can make a huge difference. Some models of washing machine automatically add an extra one to certain programmes – i.e. the 'baby' cycle – but it's easy to get your own machine to run one once your chosen programme has finished.

As well as helping to reduce the amount of chemicals left on your clothes, an extra rinse will also help to reduce the amount left in your machine. So, if you're struggling with your current detergent, don't automatically switch to another as it could irritate your skin even more. Instead, try adding an extra rinse first and see how your skin responds to that, as it may offer a quick and easy solution.

## Detergent dramas

It can feel as though you're starring in your very own soap opera when trying to find the right detergent for you and your family. Anger, tears and despair can all be triggered by standing in the washing aisle and either not knowing what to choose next or finding that the product you've been happily using is proudly announcing a 'brand new formulation' on its packaging.

In truth it is possible to over-obsess about detergent – it is all too easy to try to pin down that one elusive 'cause' for eczema flares, but alas eczema is rarely so simple. If you are struggling to find something that works for your skin, there are things you can do to maximise your chances of buying the right product. Perfume/fragrance can be a real issue with these products, so choosing ones that do not have perfume or fragrance mentioned in their ingredients list should automatically eliminate a potential trigger. Not everyone reacts to perfume/fragrance and you might be able to use fragranced products without any issues but, if you've been unable to find a suitable detergent to date, it is an obvious thing to rule out.

Anecdotal evidence also shows that many people with sensitive skin get on better with non-biological products than biological products that contain enzymes to help remove stains. So choosing non-biological formulas could also help, although scientifically there isn't any reason why this should be so.

Equally, don't assume that expensive or 'specialist' products are automatically better for



your skin. Many find that own-brand products from the local supermarket can be just as good as the premium names.

Also check that, whichever product you're using, you don't use too much of it – use as little as is consistent with getting a clean wash. This may well be less than suggested on the packaging. Overdosing your wash can cause problems because of the concentration of chemicals used. Equally, do not overload your machine or the clothes will not be rinsed thoroughly enough.

While what works for one person with eczema won't necessarily work for another, it can help to know which products other sufferers have found useful in the past. We

recently asked the National Eczema Society's Facebook users to tell us which products worked for them and the most commonly mentioned (in no particular order) included:

- > **Surcare Sensitive**
- > **Aldi Almat non-biological**
- > **Ecover Zero range**
- > **Lidl's Formil non-biological**
- > **Asda non-biological and its Little Angels range**
- > **Simply (Sensitive and Pure versions)**
- > **Fairy non-biological**
- > **Persil non-biological**
- > **Tesco non-biological**
- > **Daz**
- > **Boots Sensitive Skin**

And, if you've already found something that works, don't get complacent. The ever-

present risk of a manufacturer altering the 'magic formula' that's worked for you is also the reason to stockpile a product once you've found it so that – if a change is made – you have enough to keep you going for a month or two while you search for a suitable replacement. Far better than having to panic buy something new, as you've completely run out of your old one!

## You're just not my type

Interestingly, while our Facebook users were widely in agreement when it came to the brands they use, they disagreed significantly on the best format – tablets, powders, liquids, gels – for those with sensitive skin.

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The overwhelming preference seemed to be for liquids or powders though, with users falling into one camp or the other. For example, I can use Persil non-biological powder but my skin is deeply irritated by Persil non-biological liquid. For others, it is the reverse and they can tolerate a liquid detergent far better than a powder version. As a general rule though, no one was keen on tablets – possibly because they can stop you using less detergent prewash than the manufacturer recommends.

If you don't currently know which camp you fall into – powder vs liquid – it may therefore be worth trying different formats of the same product rather than changing brand completely.

Of course, some people omit detergent altogether and use Eco balls or an Eco egg in their wash instead. However, some users do report that their washing isn't as clean as it is when using conventional detergent.

## Soft touch

The use of fabric softener also proved divisive amongst the group, with some able to tolerate it happily and others finding it caused irritation.

Again, this is a very individual matter but, when looking for a new detergent, it would make sense to remove fabric softener from the equation so you are solely testing the detergent itself. Once you have found one that works for you and have used it for over a month successfully, then you can trial the use of a fabric softener if you so wish.

## You've got a friend in me

If you want your washing machine to give you its best performance every time, you need to take extra care of it.

The different parts of your machine can easily get clogged up with 'nasties' including bacteria, mould and chemicals – studies have shown that a build-up of bacteria in the interior of a washing machine can transfer to the wash water of subsequent cycles with as many as one million bacteria found in just two tablespoons of wash water – so it's vital to run a hot wash at 90° when the machine is empty at least once a month. Use a biological detergent for this 'empty' wash. This can also help to minimise the damage done by emollients to washing machine seals. In addition, regularly take out the detergent drawer and give it a hot soak while using an old toothbrush to remove any build-up that's on it.

Finally, always remember to leave the washing machine door and detergent drawer open between cycles so the machine fully dries out. This will also help to prevent mould from developing inside and bacteria from multiplying.

**While there are no easy answers, these suggestions should give you a useful framework in which to make changes to different aspects of your washing routine. It's important to remember though that – while many people state that their detergent is to blame for a sudden deterioration in their skin – it could very easily be something else entirely that has prompted a flare up. It's therefore vital to ensure that your skin-care routine is as thorough as possible when trialling new laundry products, as you may just find that your laundry product isn't to blame.**