

Being aware
Knowing how to
manage your skin

Best treatment
Exploring what
works for you

Know your enemy
Staying away from
certain irritants

**MEDIA
PLANET**

ECZEMA

A
SPECIAL
ISSUE
ON TAKING CARE
OF YOUR
SKIN

TREAT YOUR SKIN

Mastering good management: Know what treatment is available
and how best to manage the condition

PHOTO: ALENA OZEROVA/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



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CHALLENGES

Eczema is frequently more distressing than is often realised. While research continues to advance forward, much can be gained from increasing awareness. Understanding and mastering good management is essential to minimise the irritation and many inconveniences it can cause

Aiming to make the future brighter

The challenges of eczema are many, both for the sufferers and the doctors and nurses caring for them. It is very common - and if severe, it can be distressing and disfiguring. The desire to scratch can be overwhelming and the resulting damage (or severe areas of eczema) can be extremely uncomfortable.

In addition, many sufferers find flare ups embarrassing, especially if they involve exposed areas of the body. As a result, some sufferers find normal day-to-day life difficult. All the above can be particularly distressing for children (and their parents) with sometimes dramatic effects on family dynamics.



Dr Stephen Jones
President of the British Association
of Dermatologists

Treatment options

Treatment of eczema is often difficult. In people with atopic eczema, studies have shown that their skin barrier is abnormal, so that irritant and allergy-inducing substances enter their skin more easily. Eliminating these from the environment may not always be possible - although there are measures that

sufferers can take at home to try and minimize some of the more common ones. The most frequent method of managing and treating eczema is with a combination of moisturisers and topical steroid creams. Moisturisers keep the skin hydrated and improve barrier function, and steroid creams help to settle redness and itching by reducing inflammation. Bacterial infection can trigger flare ups, requiring treatment with antibiotics. Sufferers are also more prone to severe infection with, for instance, the cold sore virus.

New research

Research continues to find new triggers and treatment modalities, although nothing is simple in this regard. Much still needs to be discovered, and understood.



WE RECOMMEND



Rachael Fagg
Talks about her son's eczema and how they deal with the condition

PAGE 10

'Managing Adam's eczema has a significant impact on our daily lives and people often don't understand the wider implications'

MEDIA PLANET

We make our readers succeed!

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"I can proudly say that I have cured both of my daughters from eczema" James McPeake.

When Patricia McPeake developed severe eczema as a baby, her family's life was turned upside down. "It came out of nowhere, I can only describe it as horrible, a nightmare" says James. Patricia was covered in red, itchy and very painful patches over 95 per cent of her body, "Having been a happy, placid baby, she was so distressed she wouldn't sleep, eat or stop crying and scratching".

After trying many creams unsuccessfully, James scoured the Internet for over a year to find ingredients that were thought to have helped other sufferers from eczema.

Finally, Mr. McPeake came up with a formulation, once he had made the formulation in to a cream, he tried it on baby Patricia's skin. "For the first time in more than a year she slept all the way through the night, without waking up from the itch-scratch-itch cycle".

The next morning, when he saw his daughter, she was a different child. Her skin had made a huge improvement.

Now she is clear of the condition, she is sixteen years old and still uses the Dermatique products. "She finds them much better than any others she's tried".



(James and his daughter Patricia)

"I believe we have the best products and formulations, using, tried and tested ingredients that are all natural. It's not only the ingredients we do use in the creams; it's also the ones we don't use".

James also has a younger daughter called Jasmine. When she was a baby, she also developed a very severe and debilitating eczema, especially on her face. He tried the Recuperating Cream on her and by the next day there was a miraculous improvement.



(Jasmine, 10 years old)

Both of James's daughters have very sensitive skin. He has formulated a range of another four products (Recuperating Lotion, Balancing Hair and Body Shampoo, Bath and Shower Moisturising Oil and Recuperating Hair and Body Complex) to help them control their eczema and sensitive skins. Now they both have beautiful skin.

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INSPIRATION

Question: Eczema can make even the most fundamental parts of daily life difficult and painful. What are the secrets to coping as well as possible?

Answer: Knowing what to use and when to use it sounds simple, but mastering the basics is key. Learn what suits your skin, and what doesn't

The key to managing your eczema effectively

CHANGE

"The biggest challenge of eczema is the effect that the disease has on its sufferers - and the fact that there is no cure for it at the moment" says Bevis Man of the British Skin Foundation (BSF). "Most people will dismiss eczema as something that can be easily treated with a cream. Whilst there is a certain truth to this, there are also a huge number of people whose lives are blighted by the disease."

"Moderate to severe eczema can be physically debilitating and confidence-sapping. In very severe cases, when the skin is open to repeat infection, it can even kill. The main symptom is itching, as scratching in response to the itch may be the cause for many of the changes seen on the skin. Itching can be bad enough to interfere with sleep, causing tiredness and irritability."

What are the solutions? "There are

a number of ways to manage eczema, though what works will depend very much on the individual and the severity of their eczema," says Bevis. "Emollients are often the most common way to manage the condition. Think of them as very greasy moisturisers that keep the skin soft, supple and functioning as a natural barrier and tend to cling onto the skin a lot better than 'normal' creams for the body."

"Steroid creams are often used in conjunction with emollient creams to deal with the soreness and inflammation of the skin and can come in various strengths. Some also come with antibiotics for when people scratch until the wounds become infected. For the very severe cases, oral steroids and even phototherapy whereby UV light is used in controlled doses to help alleviate the symptoms of the disease. The biggest solution of course would be to



'What works will depend very much on the individual and the severity of their eczema'

Bevis Man
The British Skin
Foundation

find a cure for eczema, which is what we're trying to find at the BSF.

"For many, eczema will be something that they grow out of by the time they pass puberty and from that point onwards won't be something they need to worry about," says Bevis. "It's certainly handy to get an understanding what it is that triggers flare ups of eczema - for some it will be stress, for others it could be as simple as wearing lamb's wool clothing that can cause the itch to start."

Changes in lifestyle can also help, he says - such as using a moisturising shower gel that doesn't dry out the skin (avoid products with SLS - sodium laurel sulphate). Small steps like ensuring the skin is moisturised can make a world of difference - and help reduce the chances of an eczema flare up.

EMILY DAVIES

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SCARRING: TOP TIPS

SCARRING CAN BE AN UPSETTING CONSEQUENCE OF ECZEMA, BUT THERE ARE SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE TO LIMIT ITS APPEARANCE

- 1 Skin camouflage offers a major step forward for anyone suffering with the consequences that can occur as a result of eczema: redness, discolouration and scars.
- 2 The colour changes that are experienced with eczema can be concealed anywhere that they occur on the body. Cover creams can give a natural even colour to the skin, although they cannot mask the changes in the skin's texture.
- 3 Adjust your colour mix as your scars heal and when the seasons change.
- 4 Prior to applying the cover cream, always apply and maintain your daily scar management routine.
- 5 It always helps to express your feelings and share the challenges faced when coping with eczema - both with and without the use of cover creams.

Vanessa Jane Davies
Skin camouflage consultant
For more information visit
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References [1] British Association of Dermatologists 2002 147 (Suppl. 62) 71 [2] 7th Congress of the European Society of Contact Dermatitis, Copenhagen 9 - 12 June 2004 [3] American Academy of Dermatology (February 2007) Poster 1041

INSPIRATION



PROTECT AND SOOTHE
Defence and protection
are key to managing the
condition

PHOTO: SVETLANAFEDOSEYEVA/
SHUTTERSTOCK

The secrets of smart defence

■ **Question:** The defence of your skin is of paramount importance in the battle to control eczema. It's not always easy – what's the answer to managing it?

■ **Answer:** Awareness is vital. Learn the triggers that cause your skin to flare up – everyone is different – and the best solutions to soothing it

CHANGE

Eczema is a complex disease which tends to be long term, explains nurse Janice Bianchi, medical education specialist and honorary lecturer at Glasgow University. "There are several different causes but there are symptoms common to all types of eczema. These include dry, cracked skin, extreme itch and redness. They may also experience weeping and crusted skin (due to the presence of infection), disturbed sleep (due to itchiness) and the resulting frustration."

How key is learning to defend your skin? "Defending and protecting the skin is an essential part of eczema management. Being aware of what makes your skin flare up (often called 'trigger factors' or



Janice Bianchi
Independent
medical education
specialist and
honorary lecturer
in nursing at
Glasgow University

'triggers') is important. Everyone is different and it can take time to work out what your triggers are but your nurse or doctor can help with this. Avoidance of triggers will help your skin to stay stable."

The best course of action is to work with your primary care nurse, GP or dermatology specialist. They will take a detailed history and work with you to develop a management routine specific to your needs, points out Janice, whose background in nursing is as a dermatology research sister, as well as a tissue viability nurse specialist.

As everyone is different the routine of defending the skin will vary from person to person. For the person with eczema, having a good understanding of their condition and where and when to seek help between review appointments is important.

The other essential part of good management is to work with your nurse or doctor to develop a skin

care plan, says Janice. "This plan should include clear directions on how and when to apply treatments to the skin. The type of treatment will depend on how active your eczema is: for instance, if you are prone to infection you may be recommended an antibiotic cream or if you get outbreaks of severe eczema or very red, inflamed skin, you may be advised to use a steroid cream or ointment to treat this."

Every skin care plan will include an emollient, Janice explains. "The word 'emollient' is a clinical term used to describe any ointment, cream or lotion used to manage dry skin conditions by helping the skin to retain moisture. Complete emollient therapy means that you will use an emollient to moisturise, cleanse and bathe with, ensuring that the skin is encouraged to retain moisture throughout the day."

Using an emollient is the equivalent of giving the skin a drink, she says - you should be using an emollient as a moisturiser at least twice a day. Most crucially, says Janice, emollients should also be used even when the eczema is clear.

EMILY DAVIES

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HYWELL'S TOP TIPS

Treat skin inflammation with topical corticosteroids

1 Anti-inflammatory creams can thin the skin if the wrong one is used in the wrong place for too long, they are very safe when used properly. It is very difficult to control skin inflammation with moisturisers alone. Speak to your doctor about the different strengths of topical corticosteroids - stronger ones may be needed for the body and limbs, and weaker ones for the face. Scalp preparations are also available. Use ointment that works for you for a few days at a time. Build in a break of a few days.

Moisturise regularly

2 Keeping your skin moist with a good moisturiser is important, especially in between a flare up. Regular use of a moisturiser (emollient) helps to prevent flares and protect the skin from cracking. Take time to look after your skin daily even when it does not look red. Moisturisers and emollients are now available through the NHS or over the counter. Sometimes a thinner cream is better for the face, whereas a thicker one is better for the body and during winter. The best time to moisturise your skin is just after a bath or shower.

Try to avoid soaps and bubble bath

3 Soaps and detergents can take away too much protective oil from your skin so use soap substitutes such as cream moisturisers or thicker emollients mixed with water.

Watch out for skin infections

4 Sometimes, eczema skin becomes infected. It may become sore, red and oozy and develop pus spots. You may therefore need antibiotics from your doctor. Sometimes, the cold sore virus can spread onto eczematous skin - see your doctor urgently if this happens.

HYWEL C WILLIAMS MSc PhD FRCP
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References: 1. Potential Skin Sensitisers in Emollients. MIMS, July 2011 and Manufacturers' SmPCs/PILs.
2. Data on file C-D_001-JO-001.

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NEWS



SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES
Pets can aggravate your allergies, so restricting them from certain rooms in your home is a good idea

PHOTO: ALBERTO PEREZ VEIGA/
SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

How to enhance health in the home

■ **Question:** The home is crucial to how your child copes with their eczema: even the cleanest home can be rife with allergens. What's the solution?

■ **Answer:** Knowing the cause of the allergy is the first step – and once that's ascertained, there are many preventative measures that can be taken

Every home presents many potential challenges to the health of a child with asthma. Allergens that are commonly found within the home, such as house dust mite, pet allergens and moulds can be responsible for allergic conditions. Anything from perennial allergic rhinitis and asthma to eczema. But if you know someone's eczema is caused by an allergen found within the home such as house dust mite or pet allergen, allergen control measures may help to reduce symptoms, says Lindsey McManus, executive director of allergy and services, Allergy UK.

"The house dust mite is found in everyone's homes, even the most clean," explains Lindsey. "It cannot be seen by the naked eye and thrives in warm, moist environments such



Lindsey McManus
Executive director
of allergy and
services,
Allergy UK

as the bed. Avoiding house dust mite allergens can be a time-consuming job so should not be considered unless you are sure that you are allergic to them," she points out.

Solutions include anti-allergy bedding, damp dusting and vacuuming with a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA

FACTS

■ **Eczema** is believed to affect as many as one in five infants and children in the UK and about one in twelve adults.

■ **There are** believed to be about six million people with eczema in the UK.

■ **In 2009**, a total of 15 people died in England and Wales from eczema, most likely as a result of repeat infection on broken skin.

SOURCE: THE BRITISH SKIN FOUNDATION

filter, hard floors and blinds rather than soft furnishings and carpets – all of which may help to lower the levels of allergens within the home, says Lindsey. This, along with good pharmaceutical measures as suggested by your GP or allergy specialist, can help reduce symptoms, she points out.

Pet allergens come from the saliva, dander and urine of household pets, and can frequently be found throughout the home. "Cat allergen in particular is very light and sticky, and very difficult to remove: regular cleaning of floors, curtains and hard surfaces can help but it is very important that pets are restricted from areas in the home where the person with the allergy will go, in particular the bedroom," she explains.

Before you look at tackling allergen avoidance in the home you must make sure that your child's symptoms are allergy-related, cautions Lindsey: "Your GP can advise you or refer you to a paediatric allergy clinic where a proper diagnosis can be made."

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ATOPIC ECZEMA: LATEST
ADVANCES AND KEY MESSAGES



Professor Michael J Cork

Head of Academic Unit of Dermatology Research at the University of Sheffield, explains the important developments in our knowledge of eczema

■ Atopic eczema arises as a result of an interaction between changes in our genes and our environment.

■ The most important genetic changes that lead to the development of atopic eczema are in the filaggrin gene and were discovered by the academic groups of Professor Irwin McLean (Dundee) and Assoc. Professor Alan Irvine (Dublin).

■ One of the most important environmental factors that lead to the development of atopic eczema is the use of soap and harsh detergents, such as sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS). SLS weakens the skin barrier allowing more allergens to penetrate through the skin.

■ The first step in the treatment of atopic eczema is to remove use of all soaps and harsh detergents such as SLS and replace with emollient products (based on mineral oil). The parents of children with atopic eczema have noticed that some emollient creams, in particular aqueous cream, make their child's eczema worse.

■ Recent research (from Sheffield, London and Bath Universities) has demonstrated that aqueous cream damages the skin barrier by breaking down its brick wall structure. This is because aqueous cream contains SLS.

■ The promise for the future is identifying ways to treat a baby (with a genetic predisposition to the disease) that can prevent them from developing atopic eczema.



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NEWS



SOFTLY DOES IT
Water softeners can offer many benefits for your skin and can help you manage your eczema
PHOTO: OLEG_MIT/SHUTTERSTOCK

It's in the water

■ Question: What benefits can a water softener provide?

■ Answer: It's often regarded as a luxury item but the positive effects of a water softener are numerous. Not just for the skin, but for the reduction of household bills and for the environment, too

In today's economic and environmentally-conscious climate, anyone who has experienced the use of a water softener would regard them as essential in areas where the water supply is hard: the difference can be dramatic.

Benefits

Most crucially for anyone with eczema, benefits for the skin include more pleasurable bathing and washing, producing water that is kinder to the skin and which leaves hair feeling softer. The benefits include the elimination of limescale formation and deposition in all

appliances supplied with the softened water. This includes central heating systems, hot water supplies, dishwashers, washing machines, kettles, water heaters, showerheads, hot and cold taps, says Tony Frost of water consultancy Aqua Focus.

Economic impact

"It has several economising benefits, including the reduction of water heating-appliance maintenance and servicing, the reduction of energy consumption, fuel costs and carbon emissions," explains Tony.

It also reduces soap, shampoo and detergent consumption, improves laundry life, eliminates scum around baths and sinks and, consequently, reduces both cleaning effort and wear on sanitaryware, as well as cleaning materials and labour costs, he says.

Is it a sound financial investment? A water softener represents a similar level of investment to a dishwasher or washing machine,

points out Tony - but it could be argued that a water softener also represents a considerable saving in fuel, maintenance and cleaning costs. "Although the actual payback will depend on specific household circumstances, a return on investment of 3 years is typical," he says.

Improvements

Many new owners of domestic water softeners have reported a significant and often rapid improvement to the condition of eczema sufferers in their homes. Some GPs and dermatological consultants have also reported a substantial improvement to patients who have moved into areas of the country where the water supply is soft. This was borne out by the results of mapping studies that have shown a lower incidence of childhood eczema in areas supplied with naturally soft water.

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TIPS: WATER SOFTENERS



Select the right one for you

1 There are several manufacturers supplying softeners and, although the performance may be similar, features may vary, such as electric or non-electric controls.

Seek professional advice on installation

2 Although installation is usually straightforward, suitable positioning is important. An experienced softener installation engineer will pinpoint the optimum location and plumbing layout. The ideal location is under the kitchen sink and is usually no more difficult than fitting a dishwasher or washing machine but it's best done by an experienced professional.

Ensure correct installation and commissioning

3 Again, this is best done by a professional.

Fit a separate hard water tap

4 It is usual to treat the water to the whole house although a separate hard water tap is recommended for a number of reasons including water supply company sampling, some aquarium and plant requirements, infant feed preparation, low sodium diet requirements.

Don't fit and forget!

5 Water softeners require very little attention but check the salt regularly to make sure that the supply of softened water is consistent. Salt replenishment is typically required every 1 to 2 weeks.

TONY FROST, AQUA FOCUS

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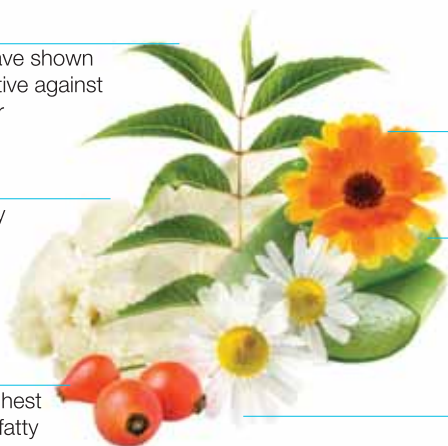
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PERSONAL INSIGHT

Rachael and Martin Fagg's 12-year-old son Adam has had eczema since he was six weeks old. Here, she explains how she copes with the "eczema rollercoaster" - and how it encompasses their lives and changes on a daily basis

The ways we manage

Initially the eczema was confined to Adam's face but it didn't stop there and he was soon covered in an itchy red rash. Eventually we were sent to the local hospital and Adam has been under the dermatology team ever since.

The early days were very difficult due to the lack of sleep, the constant need to change clothes - Adam's and mine - and coping with blood-stained and skin-filled bedding. Some days I was relieved to have a part-time job which meant I could leave Adam with my mum and get away from the constant scratching! That might sound very uncaring but I'm sure anyone who has watched their child wrestle with pain and nursed them day and night will understand that, sometimes, you just need a break from it all in order to summon the strength to carry on.

Ultimately, rightly or wrongly, we got to the stage where we decided it was just one of those things. The eczema would come and go of its own accord and for no apparent reason so we chose to make the most of

the good spells and aimed to be as prepared as possible for the bad ones.

As a family we have struggled through the relentless sleepless nights and the stress of school while trying to impress upon people that it's not just a patch of dry skin! Managing Adam's eczema has a significant impact on our daily lives and people often don't understand the wider implications, such as lack of sleep leading to a lack of concentration.

Twelve years of highs and lows have taught me that it's all about the daily management of the condition and never giving up! Even now, after all this time, we are still learning new ways to improve Adam's life.

As a parent you are left feeling helpless, useless and extremely sad. A peaceful night's sleep is a rare treat for us. I have the patience of a saint but that gets tested

when you are up during the night several times, dealing with someone scratching and pulling off layers of skin. You yourself are tired but you know you have to be calm

and comforting, though I have had times when I've shouted - and then felt bad.

We try hard to discourage Adam from scratching but sadly this often ends in a frustrated shouting match! At times all I can do is cry as I know there is nothing more I can do to help the situation. As anyone knows, your children are the most precious thing in your lives and all you want to do is protect and care for them.

Eczema really does push everyone concerned to the limit. Although Adam is the one that has to live with this much underrated skin condition its impact is felt by the entire family.

Throughout his eczema journey Adam has been a fighter and we have spent many an hour in the middle of the night talking about very grown-up feelings and emotions. He continues to be our ray of sunshine and, itch or no itch, we wouldn't have him any other way!

I just hope that someone, somewhere, will find some answers and Adam can look forward, at last, to some respite from his daily battles with the dreaded itch.



Rachael Fagg

Rachael tells of her son Adam's severe Eczema and how they manage the condition together

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