

Aggravated by Eczema



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You've noticed that dry patch behind your child's knee for a few weeks and hoped it was some or other childhood bruise. Almost overnight it turns red and itchy, and before long, you are faced with a six-year old in constant discomfort and irritation, leaving you feeling most despondent. Sufferers or parents of children with eczema know only too well how debilitating this condition can be, not only physically but on an emotional level as well. Today, with increased research, there is much that can be done to address this chronic condition.

What is dermatitis or eczema?

The terms dermatitis and eczema refer to the same condition. Eczema is an allergic condition that affects the skin causing it to become inflamed. There are several different types of dermatitis such as: contact dermatitis, seborrheic dermatitis and atopic dermatitis.

Eczema is a common condition, affecting all races and ages. About 1-2% of adults have eczema, and more than 20% of children are affected. It usually begins early in life, though stressed-induced eczema is now increasingly common in adults. Although it can occur just temporarily, for the majority of sufferers it usually recurs on and off for the majority of childhood and in some cases may even last into adulthood. It occurs in atopic people, who are unusually sensitive to skin irritation. Dry, flaky skin appears over red, inflamed areas, causing intense itching and burning.

What causes eczema?

The exact cause of eczema is not known, but specific triggers can be identified. It is activated by the immune system and is related to . Eczema can develop on first contact or over time with repeated contact.

Common triggers of eczema include the following:

- Allergy to certain foods
- Creams
- Soaps
- Clothing
- Detergents
- Sweating
- Weather
- Rubbing and friction
- Environmental allergens
- Bacteria
- Jewellery
- Emotional or mental stress

Other Contributing Factors:

- People with severe eczema usually have hay-fever and asthma.
- Eczema is probably hereditary.
- Eczema is not contagious.

Risk factors for flare-ups of eczema include:

Intake of foods that induce a reaction, illness, physical or mental stress and exposure to skin irritants

Symptoms of eczema:

The first symptom is usually itching followed by a rash, which starts out as reddened inflamed skin. Some people may even develop fluid filled blisters. The rash can be located anywhere on the body but often appears on the face and in creases on the arms and legs. Itching is intense and can interfere with sleep. The individual lesions can, once they develop, 'run' together to form larger areas on the skin. Sadly if left untreated or in extreme cases scarring may also occur.

Treatment of eczema:

Removal of the cause is the first and often most effective action to take. Once the cause is eliminated, flare-ups can be avoided and the lesions will have a chance to heal.

Allopathic treatment may involve the following protocol:

- Applying a steroid cream (hydrocortisone) along with anti-itching lotion. Anti-inflammatory drugs are sometimes prescribed to reduce the associated inflammation. Some doctors may suggest an antibiotic or antifungal should there be concern of infection.

Tibb and eczema:

Tibb advocates the use of suitable medication together with an appropriate diet and lifestyle changes to effectively control eczema. Dermatitis is a cold and dry condition, and therefore all factors that increase coldness and dryness are to be avoided. Making appropriate changes to diet and lifestyle should be maintained on an ongoing basis to avoid the incidence of flare-ups

How to minimise or avoid the attacks:

- Take short warm showers (hot water can aggravate the rash), rather than baths, as this helps prevent dry skin
- Use a mild unscented soap
- Dry yourself carefully and apply suitable moisturiser all over your body.
- Avoid lotions with fragrances and irritating substances
- Avoid wearing tight-fitting or scratchy clothing
- Avoid scratching. If you can't stop yourself from scratching, cover the area with a dressing. Scratching the rash can lead to it becoming infected and this slows up the healing process.
- Perspiration can irritate the rash. Avoid strenuous exercise during a flare-up.
- Take steps to minimize stress.
- Eating correctly and adequate sleep are important.

Holistic treatment of eczema:

There are many alternate treatments available from topical creams to herbal remedies. Creams often contain Calendula or Hypericum to prevent infection and relieve itching. Aloe vera, known to be beneficial in treating skin conditions, can be used for long-term prevention. Tibb's Skin Calm has also produced successful results.

Eczema treatment is individual based, as each person's situation is different. Tibb doctors suggest the use of a "trigger diary", whereby records are made of diet, frequency of occurrences and other factors that may be linked to aggravation.

Health professionals are in agreement that there is a link between eczema and diet. An appropriate diet assists in the prevention of eczema flare-ups. Furthermore, an adequate supply of nutrition that supports good healthy skin is most beneficial.

Certain foods are known to trigger eczema flare-ups. Tibb advises sufferers to stay away from foods that are dry and cold. Some well-known food triggers include cow's milk, wheat, shellfish, peanuts, eggs, soy, corn, oranges and food preservatives (for example, MSG).

Many eczema patients are found to be deficient in certain essential vitamins and supplements. Studies show that flaxseed, evening primrose oil and zinc are good considerations. Supplements do not produce instant results, however. You will need to consume them for a period of six months or longer to produce benefits for your skin.

Although Eczema is discomforting on many levels, don't despair, making sound lifestyle choices and being aware of contributing factors can ensure a quality-filled life. To find out more contact The Ibn Sina Institute of Tibb on 011-991 7300 or info@tibb.co.za