

NOTTINGHAM SUPPORT GROUP FOR CARERS OF CHILDREN WITH ECZEMA

In association with : Nottingham University Hospitals 
NHS Trust

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, Dr Ruth Murphy, Dr Jane Ravenscroft, Nurse Consultant Sandra Lawton and parents on behalf of the Nottingham Support Group for Carers of Children with Eczema.

Teenage Eczema - Information for Patients

Eczema does not have to spoil your life and you are not alone. Five million people in the UK have eczema and the chances are that one in every ten of your teenage friends has it too. Here are some things that you can do to reduce the impact eczema has on your life:

1. Take control

Seek medical advice and develop a good skin care plan with your doctor that suits your lifestyle. You need to read the information leaflets "[Skin Moisturisers in Atopic Eczema](#)" and "[Atopic Eczema and Steroid Cream](#)". Try to notice what makes your eczema worse - this is not always clear cut because so many things can work together. The doctor may be able to help you identify if there are particular triggers that you need to avoid. Triggers that can cause eczema to worsen include: various types of food, pollen, changes in temperature, sweat, pet hair, perfume, rough clothing like wool, smoke and even alcohol. Contact with detergents (soap, shampoo, washing up liquid and laundry detergent) and other surfactants (like conditioner) should be minimised. Use your emollient/moisturiser as a soap substitute, wash your hair in a shower or wash basin rather than in the bath, invest in a pair of household gloves for the washing up and use an extra rinse cycle on the clothes washer.

2. Body image

Self-esteem is all about how much people value themselves, and how worthwhile they feel. Self-esteem is important because feeling good about yourself can affect how you act. A person who has high self-esteem will make friends easily, is more in control of his or her behaviour, and will enjoy life more. Body image is how someone feels about their physical appearance. For many people, especially those in their early teens, body image can be closely linked to self-esteem. You may feel that eczema makes you stand out from others. Help your friends to understand your eczema and its impact on your life by talking about it. If you experience negative comments and hurtful teasing about the way you look from classmates and peers, have a look at our "[Eczema and Bullying](#)" information sheet.

3. Clothing and jewellery

Wherever possible avoid wool or coarse synthetic materials and try to have cotton next to your skin. Metal on jewellery or belts can cause a reaction when it comes directly in contact with the skin. You are more likely to have a reaction to cheaper metals, but even gold can be a problem. Look for hypoallergenic or nickel free jewellery.

4. Makeup

Look for hypoallergenic ranges of makeup. Even then, you cannot assume that it will not react with your skin. Hypoallergenic usually means free of perfume and more common irritants but there is no universal accepted definition and it does not mean it definitely will not cause irritation. Read the contents labels and try it out on the inside of your wrist and buy the smallest amount possible until you are satisfied that it is alright for you. Everyone's skin is different and some people find that no cosmetic range suits their eczema.

5. Shaving and epilation

Shaving can irritate the skin. There are two options – wet or dry shave. The dry shave of an electric razor may not be as close but it will be less likely to nick or cut your skin. Sometimes a hair or beard trimmer, set low, is more comfortable to use than a shaver. When wet shaving, a sharp razor designed for sensitive skin is important because dull blades will chafe, not glide, over the skin and will likely cause an undesirable burning sensation.

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Regardless of where you are shaving—your legs, bikini area, face, underarms—remember to lather. You can use your emollient for this. Always shave in downwards direction (and the same when applying creams) to avoid the risk of folliculitis (inflammation at the base of hairs). Shaving slowly and making sure you do not go over areas you have shaven already is important for decreasing tension on the skin. After shaving apply emollient to soothe the skin. Epilators and then the hair regrowth can both make the skin very itchy. The more permanent options like electrolysis and laser treatment can also cause reactions on sensitive skins: if you are going to try these options go to a reputable practitioner and try it out on a small area of the body where any resulting problems will not be so obvious.

6. Hair Dying

Hair-dye products contain a wide range of chemicals and almost any of these could trigger sensitivity reactions. Local irritation will tend to affect the scalp, neck, forehead, ears and eyelids; generalised symptoms may include more widespread itching, urticaria (nettle rash), general unwellness or, rarely, anaphylaxis. In general non-permanent hair dyes cause less reactions than permanent ones, but are by no means a safe option. Vaseline around the hairline, neck and ears stops the dye staining and helps to protect the skin. For more information visit: http://www.allergyuk.org/fs_hairdye.aspx

7. Tattoos

Tattoos cannot be put on damaged skin and rely on your being able to resist itching them for a couple of weeks afterwards. Avoid black henna non permanent tattoos. Black henna is not – and never was – intended for use as tattoo dye. Actually, it is hair dye. It is not meant to come in contact with skin for long periods of time and even the hair dye can be dangerous to those with an allergy to PPD (paraphenylenediamine which is a chemical that contains a compound that is derived from phenylenediamine, a toxic substance). The problem is that most people don't know if they are allergic to it until they have already received lasting damage from a reaction. For more information visit: <http://tattoo.about.com/od/hennainfo/a/blackhenna.htm>

8. Acne

Developing acne as well as eczema can feel like you have added insult to injury. If you are already feeling self conscious about your eczema, then getting acne on your face can seem like the last straw. The combination of acne and eczema on your face can present some problems as many of the acne lotions are drying and can make eczema worse, and because some eczema treatment like topical steroids can make acne worse. The good news is that acne is easily treated with a range of lotions and tablets from your GP. Don't waste time trying to treat you acne with stuff you buy over the counter – go and see your doctor and get some treatment that works. Try and avoid alcohol-based acne lotions as these tend to dry out the skin more – gels and creams may be better for you. Thankfully, the areas of the face affected by eczema tend to be separate from the areas affected by acne, so it is possible to use acne creams for your acne in one part of the face and eczema creams on other areas where the eczema affects your face. Try and avoid greasy moisturisers if you have acne – a light cream to any dry patches is all you need.

9. Eating and drinking

During your teenage years your body is doing heaps of growing. Food allergies are not the main cause of eczema and are not always easy to detect as they make take several hours or days after eating to show an effect on the eczema. Foods that might cause a reaction include milk, wheat, eggs, citrus, fish, seafood and peanuts. Many people can eat these food stuffs without their eczema flaring but if you are not one of these lucky people, make sure you have some suitable alternative snacks available. See our [Food Allergy Information](#) sheet which gives sources of reliable allergy related food content but when in doubt, read the content label of food packs. When eating out, stick to foods you know are alright.

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Restaurants are much more aware of food allergies nowadays and may be able to advise you too. Alcohol can make eczema worse too by making you itch more as the alcohol opens up the small blood vessels in the skin.

10. Exercise

Exercise is generally a good idea and can help with your body image (see above). Please refer to the "[Eczema and Exercise](#)" information sheet.

11. Exams

Make sure your teacher is aware of your condition so that they can be understanding and helpful where ever necessary. If your eczema causes problems with your hands making writing difficult discuss with your teacher, several months before the exam, the possibility of the exam board permitting you to use a computer or an amanuensis (someone to write for you in the exam). Surviving exams is generally a matter of commonsense. Eat a well balanced diet, which includes plenty of water. Get plenty of sleep. Take time out from study to 'chill out' and relax. Don't leave study to the last minute, be sensible and spread it out so you don't need to cram and can feel well prepared for each exam. If possible wear loose fitting cotton clothing that will not enhance sweating. Request to sit in a well ventilated cool area of the room.

12. Career choices

Don't let eczema stop you doing what you want to do but someone who has had eczema should avoid jobs that can injure the skin. Military service automatically excludes people with eczema. Wet work in restaurants, hairdressers or hospitals is especially damaging to hands predisposed to drying and cracking, so you will need to explore ways of protecting your hands if you choose these careers. Generally, it's better to pick "clean" indoor work such as with computers, papers or books, given the choice. For more information about the impact of work on the skin visit: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/skin/employ/index.htm> There are some eczema stories here http://www.childrenfirst.nhs.uk/teens/health/real_stories/archive/e/eczema_corrine.html

For further advice please contact
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For advice on support issues please contact the NSGCCE via the website
www.nottinghameczema.org.uk and click on the contact icon  at the
top of most pages or email us at enquiry@nottinghameczema.org.uk

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