


# 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.

## Stress and Eczema - Information for Parents

Eczema affects 6 million people in the UK and 20% of children in the UK have suffered from eczema. Stress is not a cause of eczema but it can precipitate a flare (1). Conversely eczema can cause stress in both sufferers and their carers (2) (3).

In children some of the causes of stress could be: potty training, tiredness, being out of routine, changes (such as the main carer returning to work), school /playgroup. This does not mean that these events should be avoided, but they could be handled sensitively to minimise stress.

Everyone experiences stress from time to time and in adults recovery may be possible after a period of rest. In childhood though stressful factors may be more difficult to understand and this may make the stress response last longer, making the eczema more difficult to control. Stress is known to cause habit patterns (4) and compulsive behaviour, which can reinforce the itch-scratch cycle (5) in those with eczema. Continuous scratching can alter the integrity of skin leading to barrier damage. Scratching also causes undesirable changes in skin such as thickening and breaking, making it harder for the skin to absorb treatment creams and allowing ingress of infection.

Existing feelings of anger, anxiety, sadness or guilt can also contribute to stress. Scratching decreases negative emotions and memories in the brain (6).

Suggested ways of reducing stress for the **child**:

Reassuring routines

Distraction techniques

Opportunities for exercise

Explore feelings (perhaps with the help of teacher, nurse or counsellor)

Relaxation exercises

Pets (preferably reptiles, insects or fish)

Suggested ways of reducing stress for the **carer**:

Time out

Alternative therapies like reflexology, acupuncture or aromatherapy

Share night time care with family or friends

Process your emotions (through social support or professional help)


Exercise and Meditation

Caring for themselves (nutrition and pampering)

website - [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk)

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## References

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- (2) Cycle of stress in flare ups - King RM, Wilson GVE. Use of diary to investigate Psychosomatic relations in atopic dermatitis. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 1991; 35(6): 697-706
- (3) Psychiatric comorbidity in adult eczema, Schmitt, Romanos, Pfennig, Leopold, Meurer , *Br J Dermatol* 2009 14 Jul
- (4) Dias-Ferreira, Sousa, Melo, Morgado, Mesquita, Cerqueira, Costa, Sousa: *Science* 31 July 2009 Vol 325, no 5940, pp 621-625.
- (5) Scratching increases inflammation and stimulates nerve fibres, leading to more itching and scratching (Hagermark & Wahlgren, 1995).
- (6) Yosipovitch, Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center (2008, February 1). Why Scratching Relieves An Itch. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved August 20, 2009, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/01/080131121804.htm>

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For advice on support issues please contact the NSGCCE via the website  
[www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk) and click on the contact icon  at the  
top of most pages or email us at [enquiry@nottinghameczema.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@nottinghameczema.org.uk)

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