

Fighting itchy skin (Eczema)

Itchy skin medically referred to as pruritus is an unpleasant sensation that causes the need to scratch (American Academy of Dermatology, 2005). One of the causes of itchy skin is Eczema (medical term: atopic dermatitis) which is a continually itchy skin condition consisting of skin dryness and inflammation (The Eczema Society of Canada, 2009).

An article published by the National Eczema Association in the Canadian Nurse magazine (National Eczema Society, 2010) reported that:

- Over 1/3 of Canadian women experience itchy skin always/frequently, regardless of the season.
- Over five million people (17% of the Canadian population including children) suffer from symptoms eczema.
- Eczema occurs in both children and adults, but usually appears during infancy. 20% of young children and infants have atopic dermatitis, of which 60% carry into adulthood.

Triggers of eczema

There are many factors which are known to trigger or worsen eczema. Some of these causes include the following (EczemaGuide, 2008):

- Weather conditions and air-borne allergens- Conditions such as pollution or smog, house dust, house dust mites, moulds, pollen, and animal dander from pets are all known to cause eczema to flare.
- Food triggers- Commonest reactions occur to the following foods: milk, eggs, peanuts, soya beans, wheat, sea food and fruits with seeds.
- Skin irritants- Clothes using synthetic fibres such as nylon, polyester or wool tend to irritate the skin while Latex, rubber and plastics should be avoided without protective cotton liners.
- Stress- Anxiety and emotional tension have been known to trigger eczema.

How to control eczema

Dr Sandy Skotnicki-Grant pointed in the Canadian Nurse magazine that while some conditions that aggravate eczema, like winter weather and genetics, are certainly out of your control, there are things one can do to control like

- Modifying baths to daily routines by taking lukewarm baths or showers for no longer than 10-15 minutes. A gentle towel drying may help in preventing excessive removal of oils from skin.
- Moisturizing the skin reduces water loss and is successful in managing eczema. Try to find moisturizers with less allergen and irritants, a fragrance free moisturizer may be advisable.

- Reducing the amount of detergent used in the load during laundry. Select a brand of detergent that's mild, phosphate and fragrance free, and avoid using fabric softeners and bleach.
- Cleaning your home removes household dust mites, moulds, pollen and animal dander. Try to eliminate these irritants by washing clothes at high temperature, vacuuming regularly and using humidifier.

Works Cited

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