



## *Eczema Around the World*

### **Director's Message**



Eczema sufferers face the same challenges whether they live in Canada, the UK, the USA, Brazil, or Japan. While each country has different medical systems, and even different medications and treatments for eczema, the experience of those suffering remains the same. Sleepless nights. Pain. Frustration. And the itch.

I had the pleasure and honor of representing Canada at both the Harmonizing Outcome Measures in Eczema global meeting this past year and the International Dermatology Patient Association meeting, where I had the opportunity to meet with other eczema organizations from around the globe. Regardless of our differences we all agree that our mandates focus on supporting the sufferers, and advocating for better care and improved treatments. ESC has done a lot of work at the national level, and we are pleased that eczema is now getting attention at the international level.

Join us. Raise your hand and your voice with us. People are still suffering. We need more research, new treatments, and better care, here in Canada and around the world. Sign up today at [www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca)

Sincerely,

Amanda Cresswell-Melville

## *ESC represents Canada at H.O.M.E. Global Meeting*

### **Research Update**

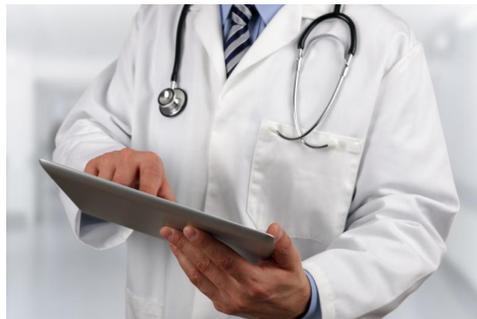
Eczema Society of Canada (ESC) supports and advocates for Canadians living with eczema, but their reach now goes beyond Canadian borders. ESC Executive Director, Amanda Cresswell-Melville recently represented Canada at the Harmonizing Outcome Measures for atopic Eczema (HOME) initiative meeting, held this past May in Malmo, Sweden.

The HOME initiative is an international collaboration to develop a consensus based set of core outcome measures for eczema for inclusion in all clinical trials. This set of core outcome measures will improve researchers' abilities to understand eczema research data in a global context. Patients and patient organizations from around the world joined the meeting, and provided input on eczema patient symptoms and quality of life. The patient perspective was represented from seven countries around the world including, Canada, USA, Brazil, Netherlands, France, UK, and Norway. ESC was proud to raise the voice of the Canadian eczema sufferer experience. ESC is committed to eczema research.

To learn more about ESC and research, visit: <http://www.eczemahelp.ca/en/research/index.html>

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## *Ask the Doctor Feature*



### **Eczema and Menopause**

**Q:** *My eczema has been managed well for most of my life, but now that I'm going through menopause it is flared up worse than ever. Could menopause be causing this?*

**A:** Menopause can affect the body not only on the inside, but also on the outside skin. Hormonal changes (a decrease in estrogen) during menopause leads to many skin changes, one of them being increased dryness and reduced ability of the skin to maintain moisture. It is well established that that dry skin can worsen eczema and cause it to flare.

When approaching menopause, if you have eczema, ensure you optimize your skin care routine

(eg. using mild, gentle soaps, avoid harsh irritants, moisturizing). This is a whole topic in itself. For tips on skin care, feel free to browse the sources on our website.

Keep in mind, there are many reasons why eczema can flare. See your doctor for a proper diagnosis and treatment plan. In addition to this, as there is variability in the severity of symptoms during menopause, it is best to discuss how to manage such menopausal changes with your doctor.

### Light Patches After an Eczema Flare

**Q:** *My 12 year old son has eczema which we manage well. He is dark skinned and now has patches on his arms and legs that are much lighter than the rest of his skin. It seems to have become worse this summer after he spent time in the sun. Is this caused by the topical corticosteroids we use on him? Will it even go away? Is there anything we can do to make it go away faster?*

**A:** The most likely cause of these skin changes after treating eczema is a common finding called "post inflammatory hypopigmentation." The inflammation that eczema causes can lead to areas of skin becoming temporarily lighter (hypo pigmented) compared to the rest. Once the eczema is controlled, most hypo pigmented areas slowly return to normal with time. These changes are most common in darker skin types, however, it can potentially happen to anyone. These areas can seem darker, particularly during summer months due to sun exposure which can cause the normal skin around it to appear darker (thus making the lighter areas stand out more). It is best to protect yourself from the sun (hats, clothing, a good broad spectrum sunscreen, etc.) to prevent the areas from appearing more prominent. Talk to your doctor about the best way to protect yourself from the sun.

Topical steroids can also lead to lightening (hypopigmentation) of the skin but this complication most often occurs in the setting of improper use of more potent topical steroids. It is best to check with your doctor to ensure you are managing your eczema properly, and of course it is always advised to see your doctor for a full assessment, proper diagnosis and treatment plan.

*We Thank Dr. Rachel Asiniwasis a dermatologist practicing in Regina, Saskatchewan for taking her time to answer these questions.*

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## No need to suffer with hand eczema



For many, dry hands are just part of a Canadian winter, but imagine having hands that are red, inflamed, and unbearably itchy year-round? Sadly, this may be a reality for Canadians with chronic hand eczema, a condition that is marked by dry, itchy patches of skin that crack and flake.

Hand eczema, or hand dermatitis, is often job-related and can be made worse by factors including frequent hand washing and exposure to chemicals.

In Shannon Robertson's case, it came out of nowhere. Robertson, an Edmonton mother of four and university professor, first noticed red, itchy bumps creeping up between her fingers, but thought it was temporary and would go away on its own. In a matter of months, the bumps spread up her hands and arms, and her symptoms became unbearable.

"The itch was maddening. I felt like I was losing my mind," says Shannon. "I would wake up five to six times a night due to discomfort and extreme itchiness. At its worst, my palms were covered in lesions, and the skin was stretched to the point of cracking. Simple tasks like washing my hair or preparing meals became excruciating. I finally said 'enough is enough'."

Shannon hit her breaking point, and admitted herself to the ER, where she was referred to a dermatologist, who properly diagnosed her hand eczema. Within three months of her new treatment plan, she was virtually symptom free, and hasn't experienced a severe flare-up since her diagnosis more than two years ago.

"Chronic hand eczema, if left un-diagnosed and untreated, can persist and in severe cases, it can have a profound impact on a patient's quality of life," says dermatologist, Dr. Charles Lynde. "The truth is, many Canadians are living with this condition but due to lack of awareness and education, they are not getting the right support. A thorough history and physical examination by a dermatologist are critical first steps in achieving a proper diagnosis."

If you live with dry, itchy, red hands or fingertips that crack or bleed, you may have chronic hand eczema, and should speak with your doctor. For additional information, the Eczema Society of Canada is an online resource that provides dermatologist-approved support and educational materials, such as the *Hand Eczema Guide*. To learn more, or to download the guide, visit [www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca).

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## *A personalized perspective on eczema management*

### **Share My Story Feature**

*By: Crystal Lee*

I've had eczema my whole life. My earliest memory is wearing socks on my hands to minimize self-inflicted damage from scratching at night. Another was wondering why I would get rashes when I went outside to play in the sun. The familiar, uncontrollable urge to itch, the brief relief that itching provided, and the regret realizing that I had made it worse is known as the itch-scratch cycle.

Living with this chronic condition is a journey, and I've come to accept it and learned that it can be managed. I'm not sure if that urge to itch really goes away, but the way I see it, there are two main steps to eczema management, which are 1) to prevent flare ups and 2) manage flare ups if they occur. In this article, I will focus on the former.

To prevent flare ups, the most helpful strategy I've found is trying to identify what triggers them. While I understand that this is way easier said than done, I have a few triumphs to share. The scratching at night ceased after I got a mattress cover with fabric that prevented contact with dust mites. Getting rashes when I went outside to play was explained by my reaction to the sunscreen that I was using, which was a huge relief because I love going out in the sun. I also tend to flare up when I'm stressed, and figuring out ways to manage my stress have gone a long way. The next flare up I get, I'll ask a million questions - Am I stressed? Did I try a new product? Was it something I ate? Was I in proximity to any animals that I'm allergic to? And I'll eventually have that 'aha' moment when I realize, "Oh right, both times that I flared up, I was playing with my friend's dog". Then, I'll make a decision for if I will pet the dog next time and wash my hands immediately, or stay away completely.

This observational approach has decreased the frequency of my flare ups, resulting in a day and night difference in my quality of life. Each person's management strategy has to be personalized and you are the best person to try and identify what triggers your, or your children's, flare ups. With this perspective on eczema management, we can learn more about ourselves and our surroundings, and work towards a more positive vision in controlling this condition.

*Crystal Lee is a Support Volunteer with Eczema Society of Canada and offers support and information to others suffering with eczema.*

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## *For the First Time, Study Proves Eczema is an Autoimmune Disease*

### **Research Update**



*Written by Charlotte LoBuono*

Atopic dermatitis (AD), or eczema, affects 10 percent of adults in the United States and about 25 percent of children worldwide.

AD is an inflammatory disorder in which the skin becomes covered in itchy, scaly lesions. These lesions cause cracks in the skin's outer barrier, exposing patients to infection. AD is always accompanied by activation of the immune system.

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## *Eczema Organizations Unite*

### **International Dermatology Patient Organization Conference**

Skin patients need support, and the International Dermatology Patient Organization Conference (IDPOC), held in Vancouver this past June, united skin patient organizations with a common mission: improving the lives of disease sufferers. IDPOC hosted over 100 delegates from around the world, and the patient organization conference was held along side the World Congress of Dermatology, which brought together dermatologists from around the world.

Eczema organizations from Australia, Canada, and the United States of America were represented, and the three organizations share a similar mission. "While each country has different health care

systems, and different treatments for eczema, the suffering of eczema patients is simialar around the world. We all have a common goal, which is improving the lives of eczema sufferers." says Amanda Cresswell-Melville, Executive Director of the Canadian organization, Eczema Society of Canada.



*Photo: (Left to right) Cheryl Talent, Eczema Association of Australia; Amanda Cresswell-Melville, Eczema Society of Canada; Julie Block, National Eczema Association (USA).*

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Hope

*"For support and resources,  
there is no finer organization  
than the Eczema Society of*

Canada." Maryam Sanati,  
Editor-in-chief, Chatelaine  
Magazine

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## Help

Want to be a Support Volunteer? Contact us at  
1-855-Eczema-1 or email us at  
director@eczemahelp.ca

