

Does the daily diet affect eczema flare-ups?

A common belief is that what you eat influences all aspects of your health and wellness – but for eczema sufferers, the relationship is much more complex.

November is Eczema Awareness Month, and the Eczema Society of Canada (ESC) is working with Dr. Miriam Weinstein, a paediatric dermatologist at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) in Toronto. Dr. Weinstein will be discussing this topic as part of the ESC's annual "Life with Eczema" information sessions, this year held in Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto.

"It is true that food allergies are more commonly found in people who suffer from eczema," says Dr. Weinstein, "but the assumption that food allergies are a root cause of eczema isn't always the case. Not everyone with eczema has food allergies, and what you eat may not be the cause of a flare-up."

Managing this skin condition through diet can be challenging since symptoms may take a few days to appear, making it difficult to isolate



particular foods that may be causing a reaction. Further, when followed strictly in an attempt to prevent or reduce eczema flares, elimination diets can be costly, impractical and exhausting. Dr. Weinstein notes that patients may be putting themselves at risk for significant nutritional deficiencies or illness, depending on which foods are avoided or removed altogether.

In extreme cases, sufferers who use elimination diets may make the mistake of replacing recommended therapeutic interventions – such as

a bathing and moisturizing regimen, or medical treatments – with these diets.

"While someone born with blonde hair is more likely to have blue eyes, one feature does not cause the other—they are genetic traits that more commonly occur together. The same can be said of eczema and food allergies," says Dr. Weinstein. "There is an overwhelming amount of information available at our fingertips, but it's important to review it with a critical eye. Trusted resources, like the Eczema Society of Canada,

that are backed by medical advisors, provide credible and accurate information among a sea of myths."

To see if an information session will be held in your community, or to learn more about the Eczema Society of Canada's online resources, visit www.eczemahelp.ca.

Clearing up the confusion around eczema

In an effort to raise awareness the Eczema Society of Canada (ESC) is giving us a list of myths and facts to help clear up the confusion:

Myth: Eczema is contagious.

Fact: No it's not. It can be caused by a number of factors, including allergies, genetics, and contact from irritants, but it cannot be passed from one person to another through contact.

Myth: Bathing is bad for eczema, and can make the condition worse by drying the skin.

Fact: Bathing plays a critical role in managing eczema. The most important treatment for dry skin is to put water back in. One way to do this is to bathe frequently. Daily brief baths should be taken in warm water, using a gentle cleanser, and should always be followed by the application of a moisturizer to the entire body. This last step is critical, as a bath without moisturizing afterward will dry the skin.

Myth: Topical steroids and other prescription treatments are dangerous and should be avoided.

Fact: Topical steroids, and other treatments, when used appropriately and under physician supervision, are a safe and effective treatment for eczema. Potential side effects, such as the thin-

ning of skin, may occur if topical steroid preparations are used excessively, or for long periods of time. It is important to follow the advice of your doctor exactly.

Myth: Eczema is caused by dairy, or other foods that are consumed.

Fact: Food allergies are commonly found in eczema sufferers; however, the assumption that food allergies are a root cause of eczema is not always the case. Not everyone with eczema has food allergies, and diet may not be the direct cause of an eczema flare-up. Consult your doctor about ways to help manage eczema triggers.

Myth: Eczema can be cured.

Fact: Currently, there is no cure. Eczema can be well managed with the right treatment and support, however. The good news is that medical community continues to investigate the causes, as well as the optimal ways to treat it.

If you struggle with eczema, the Eczema Society of Canada can help through a wide range of resources. Additional information is online at www.eczemahelp.ca.

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