

NOVEMBER IS ECZEMA AWARENESS MONTH

Get the “skinny” on eczema

(NC)—Eczema, a recurring inflammation of the skin that usually begins in early childhood and can continue throughout adolescence and into adulthood, can become so severe that it can cause intense pain.

The exact cause of the skin condition is not known. However, the more you know about eczema the better equipped you are to manage it. Michelle Carroll, President of the Eczema Society of Canada and parent of a child with eczema, answers some commonly asked questions on the condition:

Q. How many Canadians are affected by eczema?

A. In Canada, between two and five million people have eczema and it is estimated that 15 to 25 percent of children are affected by it. Experts report its incidence has tripled since 1970.

Q. What are the symptoms of eczema?

A. Symptoms of eczema include dry flaky skin, red rashes and constant itching. Symptoms can range from mild to severe, where in the most severe cases the skin is so inflamed that it becomes raw and bleeds.

Q. What is a flare-up and how is it caused?

A. When symptoms worsen, for example the skin becomes very

inflamed and reddened it is known as a flare-up. Flare-ups can be prompted by environmental elements or “triggers” such as soap, detergents, tobacco smoke, clothing fabrics, deodorants, carpet fibers, or dust. In addition, overheating, excessive sweating, low humidity, certain foods, stress and anxiety can also contribute to flare-ups.

Q. Can anything be done to keep the flare-ups under control?

A. Controlling factors in your environment can help prevent flare-ups and can reduce the amount of flare-ups you experience. For example, keeping your home cool at all times and using a humidifier during the winter and summer months even if your home is air conditioned will go a long way to keeping your eczema under control. Other helpful things you can do include using mild detergents, wearing cotton or soft clothing, bathing once or twice each day for 5 minutes in lukewarm water, and moisturizing your skin on a regular basis.

Q. How can eczema affect my child’s life in general and at school?

A. When a child is small the constant itch can disrupt the whole family’s sleep. A school-aged child who has poor skin control usually feels isolated

from his/her peers and can develop low self-esteem. Many people do not realize that eczema is not contagious and a child might be unnecessarily sent home from school. Your doctor can help you keep the eczema under control and also provide guidance on how to deal with day-to-day problems.

Q. Can eczema be cured?

A. There is no cure for eczema, but there are a number of approaches you can take to help lessen the symptoms. In addition to minimizing or eliminating triggers in your environment, the Eczema Society of Canada fully endorses hydration and believes that it is one of the best ways to avoid flare-ups. The first step to hydrating the skin is bathing. To learn more about hydration and bathing tips visit our website at www.eczemahelp.ca. However, before starting any treatment talk to your doctor to ensure it is the right option for you.

Q. How can I find a doctor in my area that knows how to properly treat eczema?

A. If your doctor is not an expert in this area, ask him/her to refer you to a dermatologist. Alternatively, you can call the Eczema Society of Canada at (905)655-9232 for more information.

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Teenager won’t sit out on life because of her eczema

(NC)—Jill Carroll is living proof that a disease does not have to stop you from living. Jill, diagnosed with eczema - a recurring inflammation of the skin - when she was just a baby, experienced many sleepless nights because of her disease and felt at times that she would go absolutely crazy because she could not stop from scratching.

Now 13, Jill is a well-rounded student and an avid ringette and basketball player. She also enjoys swimming and golf. However, her mother, Michelle, remembers the days when Jill was so itchy she couldn’t even sit still let alone play a game of basketball.

“I feel I have come a long way and owe a lot to my parents and to Dr. Krafchik at the Hospital for Sick Children,” says Jill. “Dr. Krafchik taught me the importance of keeping my skin hydrated and taking my medication when my skin gets really red and inflamed, and my parents have been there to ensure I stay on track with my treatment.”

Jill’s mom is also the President of the Eczema Society of Canada, and mother and daughter want others suffering with eczema to know that they are not alone and with vigilance and persistence it can be successfully managed.

“By following the hydration regimen strictly, Jill has been able



to keep her eczema under control,” adds her mom. “I wish I had known about hydration earlier in Jill’s life. It would have made things so much easier for our family.”

The regimen consists of a regular bath in lukewarm water (not hot water, as that dries the skin) using oil with emulsifiers such as Keri followed by light drying of the skin, and finally locking in the moisture with Vaseline, Aquafor or other moisturizer. It is also recommended that patients have a humidifier in their home throughout the summer and winter months to keep the air moist.

For more information on the hydration regimen or other helpful tips for controlling eczema, visit the Eczema Society of Canada’s website at www.eczemahelp.ca or call at (905)655-9232.

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Mother finds light at the end of the tunnel for daughter with eczema

(NC)—For the first eight years of her daughter’s life, Michelle was always looking for a cure. Her daughter, Jill, now 13, had eczema so bad that her skin would bleed. They had very little knowledge about the disease, and quickly found that so did the family physicians and pediatricians they visited. They also tried Chinese medicine, naturopaths, homeopaths and every new cream that was on the market. Nothing seemed to work.

“No one understands what it’s like to watch a child who is in such anguish because she can’t stop scratching. It’s like she had thousands of mosquito bites all over her body and there was very little we could do to alleviate the pain,” says Michelle. “We felt there was no hope and were literally at the end of our rope.”

It wasn’t until they visited the Hospital for Sick Children in October 1999 that they realized that there was a light at the end of the tunnel – that light was Dr. Krafchik.

“Dr. Krafchik helped us gain control of the disease and told us to get over the fact that there is no cure for eczema,” says Michelle. “Then she told us about the importance of hydration and using cortisone cream, when necessary to manage Jill’s flare-ups. Jill is now a completely different child. She is happy, active and can actually sleep through the night.”

Another positive that resulted from Jill’s eczema is that Michelle became involved with the Eczema Society of Canada. She and other members of the Society, including Dr. Krafchik

provide support and information to others struggling with the disease.

“Dr. Krafchik gave my family a new lease on life and I am hoping I can do the same for others. Because eczema is not life-threatening, it has not been viewed as a serious disease. I want to change that perception and that is why we have established November as Eczema Awareness Month. We want to increase awareness about this disease and we want eczema patients and their families to know that the Society is there to help them,” adds Michelle.

For more information on eczema, visit the Eczema Society of Canada’s website at www.eczemahelp.ca or call (905)655-9232.

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Taking the itch out of eczema

(NC)—Eczema can be persistent and can result in dry, itchy skin that can become so inflamed that it causes your skin to bleed. The good news is that relief is attainable and once controlled, you can lead a normal and active life.

Here are some tips to help you manage the itch:

- Hydrate the skin by bathing frequently in lukewarm water so that your skin remains smooth, soft and properly moisturized. Strictly follow the bath regimen on the Eczema Society’s website at www.eczemahelp.ca.
- Take your antihistamines with you wherever you go. If you have an

outbreak, the antihistamine will give you relief within two to four hours.

- Stay out of hot weather. Hot weather can make your eczema worse as sweating causes itchiness.
- Wear loose, 100 percent cotton clothing.
- Avoid harsh soaps and detergents.
- Work with your doctor to learn about the best treatment option for you.

For more information on eczema, call the Eczema Society of Canada at (905)655-9232 or visit the website at www.eczemahelp.ca.

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Steps you can take to ease your eczema

(NC)—If you or your child has eczema (also known as atopic dermatitis) then you are very familiar with the symptoms of dry flaky skin, red rashes and constant itching. However, there are measures you can take to help manage these uncomfortable and sometimes unbearable symptoms.

The Eczema Society of Canada recommends the following nine simple steps to ease your eczema and to keep it under control:

1. Keep your home cool at all times and use a humidifier during the winter and summer months even if your home is air conditioned.
2. Stay cool as sweating causes itchiness and can make your eczema worse.
3. Use mild detergents such as Ivory Snow, avoid the use of bleach and fabric softeners, and rinse laundry thoroughly.
4. Bathe once or twice each day for 5 minutes in lukewarm water using

oil with emulsifiers. After bathing, try to leave as much water on your body as possible, and finally lock in moisture with a moisturizer such as Vaseline or Aquafor.

5. Use cotton or soft clothing, linens and bedding. Avoid nylon and wool.
6. Moisturize, moisturize, moisturize. Always test new products before applying them to your skin.
7. If your skin is very itchy try using a moisturizer.
8. Avoid products containing potentially irritating ingredients like alcohol, make-up, perfumes/fragrances, paint strippers, and astringents.
9. Work with your doctor and let him/her know if symptoms worsen.

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