

No need to suffer with hand eczema

Treatment plans and support are available

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," Robertson says. "I felt like I was losing my mind. 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."

Robertson 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 undiagnosed 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.

The Eczema Society of Canada is an online resource that provides dermatologist-approved support and educational materials. For more information, visit eczemahelp.ca.

— *News Canada*



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