Raising the Patient Voice

Director's Message

With the new year comes promise of new treatments for eczema sufferers. There are many new treatments in development for eczema right now, and some of these promising new treatments should be coming to Canada soon.

ESC is currently creating a Quality of Life report, telling the story of what it's like to live with eczema. Eczema is so much more than just dry skin and the burden of this condition is often underestimated. We want to hear from adults living with eczema - please share your story and complete our Quality of Life survey and help us raise awareness and raise our voices to advocate for Canadians living with eczema. We are currently creating a survey for children and their caregivers about the quality of life impact eczema has on them, their caregivers, and families. If you would like to share your personal story as a parent of a child living with eczema, please contact us by email at info@eczemahelp.ca or by calling 1-855-ECZEMA-1.

Sincerely,

Amanda Cresswell-Melville
Executive Director
Eczema Society of Canada
Spotlight on Family Eczema Education Day!

ESC held Eczema Workshops for Parents and Children Living with Eczema

Patient education is a core goal of Eczema Society of Canada (ESC). On Saturday, October 15th, with an unrestricted educational grant from the Pierre Fabre Corporate Foundation, ESC launched their Family Education Day Series in Toronto. The first of its kind, this series of cross-Canada events took place in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, and addressed the growing need for eczema education and patient support. The events focused on providing practical tips and support for parents and caregivers of children living with eczema.

The events consisted of distinct programming for adult and child participants. The adult lectures and workshops were led by local paediatricians and dermatologists, and the children's program included a workshop led by dermatology nurses and paediatricians, and featured an art therapy session led by a certified art therapist and psychotherapist. More than 100 people attended nationwide, and shared their experiences and challenges dealing with this often frustrating and overwhelming condition.

Helpful tips on eczema management, from the Family Education Day series:

1) Moisturize, moisturize, moisturize! Frequent moisturizing helps mimic a "normal" barrier by keeping irritants out and moisture in. Moisturize at least once to twice a day.

2) Treat flares-ups and inflammation with prescribed medications such as corticosteroids or topical calcineurin inhibitors.

3) Eczema that is 'out of control' can often be due to eczema that is under-treated. Apply your corticosteroid until the redness is gone.

4) If a product is uncomfortable, causes irritation, or is simply a challenge to use, ask your physician for another option.

Addressing eczema's impact on quality of life:

It is often noted that eczema doesn't just affect the individual; it can affect the whole family. Common challenges include sleepless nights, confusion around appropriate and safe treatments, and dealing with the itch. In severe cases, eczema can be debilitating and has been linked with depression and low self esteem. If your child is struggling, talk to you doctor and find support from organizations such as the Eczema Society of Canada.
Thank You to the Atopic Dermatitis Foundation
Pierre Fabre Dermo-Cosmétique provided event participants with skin care product gift bag, including A-DERMA and AVÈNE moisturizing products that are specifically formulated for the treatment of atopic dermatitis. Exomega DEFI and Xeracalm A.D. have earned the Eczema Society of Canada Seal of Acceptance. These products are 100% preservative-free (listed and unlisted) thanks to the sterile cosmetic technology, thus suitable for the most sensitive skin.

New Aveeno Eczema Care Balms receive the ESC Seal

Seal of Acceptance Announcement

Eczema Society of Canada (ESC) is pleased to announce that two new products have earned the ESC Seal of Acceptance: Aveeno Baby Eczema Care Nighttime Balm and Aveeno Eczema Care Itch Relief Balm. These products have undergone rigorous review, including ingredient and formulation review, as well as review of clinical study data. These Aveeno products can be found at pharmacies across Canada.

To learn more about Aveeno products, visit:
http://www.aveeno.ca/products/baby-eczema-care-nighttime-balm

To learn more about the ESC Seal of Acceptance, visit:
www.eczemahelp.ca/products

We want to hear from you...
How does eczema impact your quality of life?

There is still time to complete our quality of life survey!
Responses will be accepted through January 13th 2017.
Do you want to help share the future of eczema care here in Canada? The Eczema Society of Canada is studying the quality of life of Canadian patients living with moderate to severe atopic dermatitis and the experience of their caregivers. Your confidential input will shape a national quality of life report and future advocacy efforts.

This survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete, depending on your responses.

Thank you for participating. Please feel free to share this survey invitation with any friends, family, or colleagues affected by atopic dermatitis.

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**Ask the Doctor Feature**

**The Relationship between Food and Eczema**

**Q:** Does a special diet improve eczema?

**A:** Specialist Joseph Lam, MD, FRCPC Sheds Light on the Role of Food in Eczema:
When suffering with eczema flares we often look for what may be causing the skin to flare. Often, eczema sufferers, caregivers, and/or parents look to something in the diet, or something eaten recently, which could be causing the redness, irritation, and itchiness.

ESC asked eczema expert, specialist Joseph Lam, MD, FRCP, from Vancouver, British Columbia, to shed some light on whether any type of special diet helps eczema, and the role of food and food allergy and our skin.

On the topic of elimination diets, Dr. Lam told us, "Although elimination diets are frequently used (and initially seem promising - after all, wouldn't it be great to 'fix' eczema with a change in diet?), they often don't work. This is because the underlying problem in eczema involves the skin barrier."

Dr. Lam explains, "There may be different triggers to eczema, such as weather changes, scratchy clothing, and viral infections, however the underlying cause is a problem with how the skin can hold water and keep irritants out." He also explains the relationship between eczema and allergies, "Many kids with eczema have food allergies (which look like hives, wheezing, vomiting or other symptoms in response to food). Current evidence suggests that the eczema may be the cause of the food allergies (in that food proteins can get in through the skin and trigger the immune response to recognize the food as an 'allergy'), rather than the food allergies causing the eczema. In the majority of cases, the data doesn't suggest foods to be the cause of the eczema."

Dr. Lam explained that because eczema waxes and wanes (i.e. some days are better, some days are worse), it can be easy to think that a change in diet is responsible for the improvement (or worsening) of the skin. However, over the long term, the actual benefits from food avoidance is small.

He outlined a few ways in which foods can make the skin worse:

1) **Direct irritation of the skin.**

Some foods, particularly those that are acidic like tomatoes and citrus, can get on the skin and cause irritation. This is common in young infants. In this case, you don't necessarily need to remove the food. You can just protect the cheeks before meals with something like petroleum jelly (e.g. Vaseline).

2) **Foods that cause a true allergic reaction (think peanut allergy).**

True allergy can cause itchy hives on the skin, possibly in addition to other allergic symptoms. Once the hives are scratched, the skin can break out in eczema. In this case, it's the scratching in response to the hives that causes the eczema, not the food causing the eczema directly. However, these cases of food allergy can be life threatening and the allergenic food should be identified and avoided.

3) **While medical evidence doesn't point to food causing flares, it is possible for a small number of sufferers.**

Due to the cyclical nature of eczema (how it waxes and wanes), you can be fooled to think that a certain food is a culprit. On a day when your eczema is clear you can eat the food you suspect may be causing flares and see if you flare. Two important notes on this: (1) If you suspect a true allergy to a food you should strictly avoid that specific food(s) and see an allergist, and (2) Before you start to withhold foods or start a strict diet, especially in children, consult a qualified physician. In controlled studies (double blind food challenge studies), where both the physician and the patient are convinced the food is triggering the eczema, many had no skin reaction.

While we'd all like the magic solution, or like to find a solution to our or a loved one's eczema, for the general population, elimination diets, although tempting, do not seem to offer a significant benefit in eczema.
Caregiver Tips

How to Support a Love One through Eczema Flares

Eczema flares can be one of the most challenging parts of managing eczema. A flare is an acute worsening of the disease, characterized by the angry signs of eczema - red skin, rash, bumpy skin, and incredible itch. If you've ever had an eczema flare, you know this all too well, and you know it is not helpful when well meaning friends or family say, "Stop scratching" or "Just go and put your creams on!". Empathy and support goes a long way to help, and we've got some tips to help guide you through the next flare.

Tips for dealing with eczema flares:

**STEP 1: Empathy**

**Do** say, "I see your eczema is flaring". Show sympathy for the child, and make them feel that you will get through it together.

**Don't** say, "Stop scratching!" The child doesn't want to be scratching, but the physiological response is to scratch the intense itch. Telling a child not to scratch can also make them feel blamed.

**STEP 2: Take Action**

Have a list of strategies that work for your child or love one. These actions can help to distract, keep fingers busy, and soothe the flare.

Some ideas include:

- Apply a cold pack to a particularly flared area of skin. Make it a motivating process by using a character cool pack, or an especially colourful piece of fabric or towel to protect the skin from direct contact of the cool pack.
- Apply creams that are cool (you can store them in the refrigerator).
- Try interactive activities that keep the hands busy (e.g. colouring, scissor crafts, video games, board games, etc).
- Use fidget toys such as stress balls, a foam ball to pick, intricate crafts, rubix cube, sensory balls, etc.
- Apply treatments as recommended by the doctor that could help with a flare.
- Take a cool shower or bath.
- Relaxation techniques (yoga, meditation, deep breathing, etc)
Children can feel their eczema is out of their control. **Involve** them in their care. Let them have control over applying the cool pack or the moisturizer. During a calm time (not during an acute flare) get your child’s input on their care and how to deal with an acute flare. This will help to **empower** them.

Ask:

- what he/she finds soothing during an intense flare
- what creams feel best on the skin, are they preferred at room temperature or chilled in the refrigerator
- what clothing or pajamas are most comfortable on the skin
- what comforts help, such as hugging a stuffed toy, a certain blanket, or listening to relaxing music

Eczema is burdensome for the child. **Praise** them for their strength, resilience, and for taking part in their care.

_Eczema Society of Canada thanks Melissa Cresswell-Sweet, Behaviour Therapist, for her editorial contributions on this article._

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**Together we are making a difference.**

**Thank you to everyone who made a donation.**

Eczema Society of Canada is partnered with Canada Helps at canadahelps.org to help raise funds for Eczema Society of Canada. Consider making a donation today! No amount is too small, and every amount makes a difference. 100% of private citizen donations go directly to eczema research.

Make a donation in the name of the loved one, and send a digital Canada Helps donation card to a loved one.

There are so many ways you have probably heard of fundraising: giving money, volunteering your time, or donating gently used goods. But have you considered becoming a fundraiser for Eczema Society of Canada to raise money and spread the word? You don’t need to be a professional and you don’t need to wait for an occasion. With CanadaHelps’ Fundraising Pages, it’s easy to turn every day gatherings into a unique fundraising opportunity. From hosting a dinner party, putting on a basketball tournament to a day at the beach, CanadaHelps’ inables you to turn any occasion into a memorable one. So gather your friends and family and start your own eczema fundraiser today!

To make a donation, [visit our page](#)
Connect

Find a support volunteer at
www.eczemahelp.ca

Eczema Help

Contact us at 1-855-Eczema-1 or email
us at info@eczemahelp.ca

Hope

"For support and resources,
there is no finer organization
than the Eczema Society of
Canada." Maryam Sanati,
Editor-in-chief, Chatelaine
Magazine