WHAT ARE BIOLOGIC DRUGS
Biologic drugs, sometimes called “biologics”, are a new type of medication approved for the treatment of atopic dermatitis (AD). On a basic level, to create biologic drugs, scientists engineer proteins that come from living tissues or cells that are created in a laboratory.

HOW DO BIOLOGICS WORK TO IMPROVE ATOPIC DERMATITIS SYMPTOMS?
Our immune systems fight off harmful bacteria and viruses using proteins called interleukin, or IL for short. People with inflammatory conditions, like AD, have an overactive immune system. This overactive immune response causes the body to mistakenly attack itself. In AD, this overreaction results in inflammation of the skin caused by IL, and biologics work to block these proteins from binding to cell receptors. This stops the process of immune overreaction and stops the cycle of inflammation.

HOW DOES A PATIENT TAKE A BIOLOGIC DRUG?
Biologics are not a topical treatment (such as a cream) or an oral treatment (such as a pill). Biologics are taken through the skin (with a needle injection) or intravenously (through the veins). In the case of AD, the first biologic developed is dupilumab, and it is taken by injection.

ARE BIOLOGIC DRUGS SAFE?
Overall, biologics are a safe class of medication, but all medications carry the risk of side effects, and it is always advisable to discuss these risks with your own doctor. It is especially important to talk to your doctor if you are trying to conceive, become pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

ARE BIOLOGICS A NEW CLASS OF MEDICATION?
Biologics have been used for over a decade to treat other conditions including psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, and inflammatory bowel conditions.

WHICH ATOPIC DERMATITIS PATIENTS WOULD BENEFIT FROM BIOLOGIC DRUGS?
For many patients with AD, appropriate skin care such as bathing and moisturizing, along with topical treatments, will manage their condition. However, for some patients who live with moderate-to-severe AD, the current therapies may not adequately control their disease and they may benefit from a biologic.

WHY ARE BIOLOGICS SO EXPENSIVE?
Biologic drugs are expensive because they represent a major scientific advancement in the treatment of inflammatory conditions. The research and development of biologic drugs takes many years and is a very expensive process.

WHAT IS DUPIXENT™ (DUPILUMAB)?
Dupixent™ (dupilumab) is the first biologic drug approved by Health Canada for the treatment of AD in adults who have failed to respond to other therapies. Dupixent™ (dupilumab) works to stop the immune system by blocking IL, which lowers the level of inflammation, and therefore decreases the symptoms of AD. The most common side effects with Dupixent™ (dupilumab) are conjunctivitis (commonly called pink eye), injection site reactions, and cold sores on the mouth or lips.
BIOLOGIC DRUGS FOR ATOPIC DERMATITIS (ECZEMA)

Ask the patient about...

WHY DID YOU START TAKING DUPILUMAB?
After many years of struggling with chronic and severe eczema, my dermatologist invited me to participate in a clinical trial for a new injection treatment for atopic dermatitis (AD). Since I wasn’t having much success with my other therapies, and was getting increasingly frustrated and disheartened with the state of my condition, I didn’t hesitate to try what appeared to be a very promising new treatment.

WERE YOU NERVOUS ABOUT TAKING A NEW INJECTION-BASED TREATMENT?
In truth, I was at such a low point and so desperate for improvement, I felt I didn’t have anything to lose. I trusted the physicians who were involved in the research and had nothing but hope. My family and friends often asked me if I was worried about being part of a clinical trial, or side effects, but at the time, I felt this had great promise and was willing to take on any potential risks to improve my circumstance.

HOW DID YOU ADJUST TO SELF-ADMINISTERING A NEEDLE?
Although it was intimidating at first, my dermatologist helped me with the transition and I got the hang of it quickly. I was used to giving blood, so the injection itself was manageable, especially as it was a single-use, pre-loaded syringe. It took some trial and error to avoid a mild stinging sensation and bruising, but soon enough, I found my rhythm. As my symptoms started to disappear, I would look forward to my next dose.

HOW HAS YOUR LIFE CHANGED SINCE BEING ON DUPILUMAB?
Within weeks, I felt I had a new lease on life, and I found empowerment to talk about my disease – something I used to keep secret – because I finally felt like I had some control over it.

ANY ADVICE FOR SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE CONSIDERING THIS TREATMENT?
Stick with it. I found it took a few weeks to see results, but when I did, it was a breakthrough for me. I had friends catch sight of my medications in my fridge, so be prepared for some questions. I was shy to talk about it at first but eventually I found acceptance and control over my body and my eczema, and am now much more comfortable discussing my condition.

HOW DID GETTING CONTROL OF YOUR ATOPIC DERMATITIS CHANGE YOUR LIFE?
The changes have been significant. Before, I would wake up countless times throughout night. Now, when my head hits the pillow, I don’t wake until morning, and notice I have more energy each day. I’m also able to enjoy social activities like swimming as I’d never want to take my shirt off before, when my AD was flared. Finally, I’ve found my relationship has improved. Before, I used to struggle to find the courage to ask someone out because I was self-conscious, and then once in a relationship, my eczema would cause intimacy issues and disruptions of my partners’ sleep. Now we argue about normal small things like the laundry and dishes, and I love it.

Eczema Society of Canada thanks Mike for sharing his personal story.

Need support managing your eczema? We are here to help, with online resources, social media communities, educational materials, and support volunteers across the country. www.eczemahelp.ca

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