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## New Treatments on the Horizon

### *Director's Message*



Although winter is behind us and spring is in full bloom, eczema sufferers know first-hand that the changing of the seasons doesn't mean symptoms let up. Treating eczema in the spring months is just as important as treating eczema during the winter. In this issue you will find some basic tips for caring for your itchy skin as well as some positive advice about dealing with eczema from our contributor Cymbria Wood.

The fresh spring air also brings some fresh, exciting news! We are pleased to announce that Dupixent<sup>TM</sup> is now officially available in Canada. ESC thanks Dr. Melinda Gooderham for her contribution to our Ask the Doctor column where she helps us better understand Dupixent<sup>TM</sup> and biologic treatments for atopic dermatitis, the most common form of eczema.

We are also excited to share a new campaign, "A Lifetime of Handshakes", designed to raise awareness about the impact of AD. ESC support volunteer Tanya Mohan is trying to gather a lifetime of handshakes, so please shake her hand and join this movement!

We are also excited to share news about Camp Libert  - a camp where children with eczema can have a fun and adventurous camp experience while receiving medical treatment for their eczema. Read on to learn more. We are also hosting our annual Life with Eczema events this April in Toronto, Montreal and Calgary - we hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

Amanda Cresswell-Melville  
Executive Director  
Eczema Society of Canada

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# Ask the Doctor Feature

## *Biologic Drugs for Atopic Dermatitis*



**Q:** *I've heard there is a new treatment for moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis. What is this treatment all about?*

**A:** Eczema Society of Canada turned to Peterborough, Ontario based dermatologist and researcher Dr. Melinda Gooderham to learn more about the role of biologic drugs in the treatments of atopic dermatitis.

### **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 biologics safe?**

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 biologics?**

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.

### **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.

*Eczema Society of Canada thanks Dr. Gooderman for her volunteer contributions to this content.*

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## Dupilumab is Now Available in Canada!

### *The first biologic treatment for moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis is now available in Canada*

ESC is pleased to report that the first biologic drug for the treatment of adult patients with moderate-to-severe atopic dermatitis is now available in Canada.

ESC has heard from Canadians about the negative impact AD can have on quality of life, and the often desperate need for more choice in treatment. Intense itch is one of the most burdensome symptoms for patients, and significantly impacts quality of life, and dupilumab offers hope to patients who have been suffering.

If you would like to learn more about dupilumab visit your doctor. Dermatologists are already enrolling patients in the Patient Support Program, so speak to your dermatologist to see if this treatment may be right for you.

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## Camp Liberté offers camp experience to children living with eczema and other skin conditions



Children living with eczema deserve the opportunity to enjoy the same summer camping activities just as much as their friends who don't live with eczema. In response, Camp Liberté Society was established by a group of Dermatologists in 2009, in partnership with the Canadian Dermatology Association, and provides a summer camp experience to children living with severe atopic dermatitis (eczema).

In addition to typical camp activities, campers receive intense skin care and disease management workshops throughout the camp. While the camp addresses a variety of skin conditions, over half of the campers suffer with eczema.

Eczema Society of Canada is proud to announce they have supported Camp Liberté with a grant of \$25,000 which will help support eczema campers at both the camp for young children, held in Quebec, and the camp for pre-teens and teens, held in Alberta.

The camps are led by volunteer dermatologists and dermatology nurses. In addition to skin specific workshops, the week at camp also offers campers supervised independence where children can have fun and build confidence. Perhaps best of all, these children can participate in typical camp activities, from swimming to hiking, and join in activities that may have at one time seemed impossible for some children living with eczema.

Do you have a child with eczema who may benefit from attending Camp Liberte? Reach out to Camp Liberte at [info@campliberte.ca](mailto:info@campliberte.ca) or visit their website at [campliberte.ca](http://campliberte.ca)

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## Join us in Toronto, Montreal and Calgary!

### *Life with Eczema FREE Educational Events*



Join us for a live, free patient event this April where expert dermatologists will give a talk on eczema care topics including managing eczema flares, help for hand eczema, and learn about new treatments including dupilumab (Dupixent™) and other therapies currently in clinical trials.

Bring your questions for our experts, and view our educational exhibit. The first 50 people to register in each city will receive an Aveeno Eczema Care gift bag at the event.

#### [TORONTO - Tuesday April 3rd](#)

April 3 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm  
Toronto Public Library - Northern District, 40 Orchard View Blvd  
Toronto, Ontario M4R1B9 Canada + [Google Map](#)

#### [MONTREAL - Thursday, April 5th](#)

April 5 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm  
Grande bibliothèque, 475, boul. de Maisonneuve Est  
Montréal, Quebec H2G3H1 Canada + [Google Map](#)

#### [CALGARY - Thursday, April 26th](#)

April 26 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

**Register Today**

To learn more visit [www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca) or email [info@eczemahelp.ca](mailto:info@eczemahelp.ca)

Register now! [Click here.](#)

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## A Lifetime of Handshakes



The average person shakes 15,000 hands in his or her lifetime. For people with atopic dermatitis (AD), even a simple handshake is often avoided. AD is a chronic form of eczema characterized by inflamed and itchy skin. Beyond the physical symptoms, AD can have a deeply negative impact on a person's emotional and social well-being. Our Quality of Survey last year found that patients living with moderate to severe forms of the condition have avoided social activities in the past two years because of their AD.

We are excited to share "A Lifetime of Handshakes", a groundbreaking new campaign designed to raise awareness about the impact of AD. Sanofi Genzyme has partnered with Tanya Mohan, a Canadian woman with AD, on a cross-country mission to shake a lifetime of hands. Why a handshake? A handshake is powerful. It can begin new chapters or bring people together.

To help Tanya reach her goal, please visit [www.handshakes.ca](http://www.handshakes.ca) for a virtual handshake and help spread the word on your own social channels. Help her reach her goal of achieving 15,000 handshakes!

**A LIFETIME  OF HANDSHAKES**

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## Basic Tips for Managing Eczema

*Caring for Your Itchy Skin*



**1. Hydrate the skin!** Dry skin is itchy skin, and perhaps the most important step in eczema management is moisturizing the skin. It is generally recommended to apply an emollient at least twice daily, and always follow any bathing or hand washing with the application of an emollient.

**2. Treat the inflammation.** Red, raw, inflamed skin may need a prescription treatment to clear. Work with your doctor to find treatments that will reduce inflammation and make your skin more comfortable.

**3. Avoid your triggers.** For some people it will be itchy wool clothing, for others dust, and for others pet pander. Many substances in our environment can be an eczema trigger. Do some detective work to find your triggers. Also keep in mind that some eczema flares happen without a discernible trigger.

**4. Fight the itch!** Eczema is itchy so find ways to reduce that itchiness such as using moisturizer or treating the inflammation with your prescription treatment. During an acute flare, avoid scratching by keeping hands busy with an activity, or distract yourself with a good book, or movie. You can also help relieve the itchy sensation by using a cool pack or taking a cooling shower.

**5. Get support.** Reach out to a friend, or loved one. Ask your doctor about psychological support, as living with a chronic illness can be draining, and frustrating, and it can be helpful to talk to someone about it. Reach out to an ESC support volunteer. We're here to help.

*To learn more about eczema management and support visit [www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca)*

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## The Creative Outlet

### *Reframing eczema: The exquisite itch*

By Cymbria Wood



Nothing hurts more than watching someone you love suffer, and the language of eczema is all about suffering. The charming bonus? The language of its treatment centers on harsh restrictions: cutting out certain foods, fibers, scents, even hot water. The verbiage is bleak.

But I have a secret. If language shapes perception, then there's something about eczema you don't know. Because there are some intimacies that go beyond words. Don't get me wrong; I've suffered from eczema! Writhing in bed at 8 years old, dragging the rough seam of my pajama top between my fingers until they bled. Now, at 35, I haven't worn shorts in almost a decade. The last time I used steroid cream both legs got infected - leading to yet another cream. Suffering is when the raw backs of your calves start sweating under your skinny jeans (amateur mistake!) on crowded public transit. I've woken up wailing at 2am trying to drown out or at least give voice to my screaming ripped and purple skin. Believe me. I have SUFFERED from eczema ...and allergies, and asthma. And I am not alone. The classic comorbidities of eczema are well established and new research is expanding to look at mental health connections to anxiety, autism, depression, etc.

Are we victims then? Born afflicted, cursed, diseased? And what then? Try to fix us through restriction of pleasures, of sensation, and that one final terrible dictum... "don't scratch!?" This is the language of less-than, though born of love and the pain of watching your little boy or girl in very real torment. But humans are hardwired for abundance and here's my secret. What if it's the world that isn't designed for us? GMO foods, pollution, chemicals... humans are really brilliant at engineering a highly inhuman environment. What if your child's eczema isn't a genetic failure or flaw, but an invitation for you to see him/her or even yourself as having magical access to that abundance? Let's look again at that pattern of comorbidity.

No need to get into the biological complexities of the immune system and/or its systemic interactions, the common thread here is sensitivity. The language of eczema circles around the discord and discomfort because everyone can relate to its very visible suffering. But beneath the red, scaly skin there is an underlying intimacy with existence that can never be shared through language. Your uniquely sensitive little girl can never truly describe to you the incredible comfort and wonder she feels in every pore when she lifts her cheeks to the sun. You may never understand the peaks of eager ecstasy your little boy will feel when his first crush brushes by his elbow. When I eat a fresh garden tomato I become that tomato - with every cell of my being.

I promise you one thing. And I say this even after working Subway lunch rushes in those clammy plastic gloves and absolutely contemplating the amputation of my inflamed, gnashing pinky. I promise you I would never trade my own sensitivity, for anything. The world is going to hurt for all of us, but only some of us will ever feel the overwhelming grace of its kisses all the way down to our tiny itchy toes.

A conscious diet doesn't have to be about restriction, not when our sensitivity gives us permission to taste the universe in every pumpkin seed. Embrace the glory of it! Don't scratch? I am not advocating wild abandonment here. But you have to understand that sometimes, seriously, that moment of relief is all we have.

Sometimes I tickle my left ankle to bring the itch up to the surface, priming the nerve endings. I thrill to the anticipation as the itch ripens into its most abundant urgency, then give my ankle a light

fingernail teasing, searching out the sweet spot of the day. There are so few absolutes in this life, but this is 100% satisfaction guaranteed. I let my head fall back and my eyes close as the ecstasy takes over. The whole world sparkles as I dig in and chase that fine line between pleasure and pain. I know I'll cross it - every time. Eczema can be hell, but how many of us can find heaven inside a sock, a tomato, or a single longed-for touch?

Dare to reframe eczema by challenging its language. We are all born for abundance, but there are some of us who don't have to reach as far to find it. This is my secret, my exquisite itch.

*Cymbria is a Calgary writer/illustrator/designer who lives with eczema and her golf-mad husband - though not in that order. Discover more of her work on her blog [BlankCanvasLiving.com](http://BlankCanvasLiving.com).*

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We're making a difference,  
and you can help us reach our goals.

*Every step toward research is a step toward a cure*



We desperately need better care and more research for eczema and you can help.

Eczema Society of Canada (ESC) is furthering Canadian eczema research through our Research Grant Program. In the past year ESC has funded two university centre research projects.

**Each and every one of your donations (that's 100% of private citizen donations) go directly to eczema research grants through our grant program.**

All donations \$20 and greater are eligible for an official tax receipt, and no donation is too small.

Eczema Society of Canada is partnered with Canada Helps for secure online donations. Donate now through [Canada Helps](#).



*Together we are making a difference.*

Connect

Find a support volunteer at

[www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca)

Hope

*"For support and resources, there is no finer organization than the Eczema Society of Canada."*

Maryam Sanati, Editor-in-chief,

Contact us at 1-855-Eczema-1 or email us at  
[info@eczemahelp.ca](mailto:info@eczemahelp.ca)

