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Eczema – the facts

What is eczema?

A skin condition affecting around 10% of adults in the UK with an average of 20 'flare ups' every year in sufferers. The skin may become dry, itchy and hot and if the problem worsens the skin breaks and cracks, becomes raw and bleeds, particularly on the arms and legs. Babies often have facial eczema. Nearly 70% of children who have eczema grow out of it by their mid-teens and it cannot be passed on from one person to another.

What causes it?

The commonest type is called atopic eczema, which is usually also linked to hay fever and asthma. This is believed

to be inherited, making people with it more sensitive to allergies. Other types of eczema can be triggered by the body. There is an excessive reaction by the body's own defences and this causes skin problems. Also, some types may be caused by local irritants such as detergents or nickel.

How is it treated?

The first step is always to get an accurate diagnosis, either from your own doctor or from a skin specialist (a dermatologist). Treatment is usually in the form of creams and include emollients – moisturisers that help to stop the skin drying out – that can be put in the bath, used as soaps or

rubbed onto the skin. Topical steroids are also frequently used to reduce redness, itching and inflammation. These come in varying strengths and your doctor should monitor your skin to make sure you are not using an unnecessarily strong steroid cream. Other treatments include antihistamine tablets to reduce the itching and wet-wrap bandaging to soothe dry skin.

Where can I find out more?

Call the National Eczema Society Helpline on 0870 241 3603 (open 1pm-4pm, Mon - Fri) or contact them on www.eczema.org Eczema Awareness Week is 23rd-30th September, 2001.

Doctor's tips

- Use non-biological washing powder and avoid fabric softeners.
- Try and avoid wool and synthetic clothing – use cotton clothing and bedding instead.
- Eat broccoli, cauliflower, red cherries, onions and garlic. These contain an anti-allergenic component called quercetin that helps some sufferers.
- Starflower cream can reduce itching, especially in children.



Aloe vera helped relieve my son's eczema



Five weeks after giving birth to Joe I noticed spots on his forehead which spread all over his head and down his shoulders. Joe started to scratch himself and we had to put scratch mitts on his hands. But this made the spots flare up as he became hot and frustrated.

Our GP diagnosed eczema. By the time Joe was four months old it had spread throughout his body. He was prescribed medicines, including steroid creams, and I was told to bathe him every night in balneum, a prescribed oil that moisturises.

By seven months, even poor Joe's face and

neck were infected, he had weepy eczema in his joint creases and scaly skin all over his body. My husband Kevin, 38, and I were now desperate to find a solution – we scoured the library and the Internet for a cure.

But then a friend suggested we try Aloe Propolis Creme, which is made from aloe vera gel and bee propolis, a natural product of the beehive. As it is a natural antibiotic the idea of using the cream appealed to me, so we cautiously decided to apply it to Joe's affected areas twice a day.

Initially we used it alongside the steroid creams and noticed a result in a couple of weeks as the infection on his face started to go down. After a month it had virtually gone and the rough skin on his limbs was softer and less itchy. We also replaced the balneum with aloe soap which soothed him at bath times.

When Joe was 11 months we introduced the aloe berry nectar drink, first just a teaspoon and then increasing the amount. We started to notice his skin tone change colour from a sickly white with red blotches to a proper baby pink colour.

With the help of the doctor we started to wean Joe off the steroid cream until we were just using

the Aloe Propolis. During this time the weepy eczema on his leg joints vanished.

Joe is now approaching his third birthday. We still use the Creme and he has near-normal skin as well as being free from the distress of constant itching and irritation. I keep him off cow's milk as this causes a minor reaction but apart from that he has no symptoms and is a healthy, happy boy.

Maggie Mutters, 36, full-time mum, Dulverton, Somerset

- If you are interested in finding out more about Aloe Propolis



It's a product of the beehive

Woman's Own magazine cover with Maxine and Aloe Propolis Creme product.