

Natural approaches for treating eczema

By Mary-Jane Sharratt of Sussex Homeopathy

Although rarely life-threatening, eczema can be extremely distressing for the sufferer. Not only can it be incredibly itchy and uncomfortable, it can be unsightly which is upsetting for those with the condition. However, there are natural treatments available which can help achieve real improvements in your skin.

Eczema symptoms vary from one sufferer to the next – some have dry flaky skin while others have red inflamed patches, prone to blistering and discharge. For some it is worse in the winter, for others it is unbearable in bed at night whilst some sufferers will find it is excessively itchy after a bath or shower.

Conventional treatment usually involves the use of topical applications of petroleum-based or steroid creams. In severe cases, where the skin is prone to infection, oral steroids or antibiotics may be prescribed. Over a long period of use, steroid creams can thin the skin although they are usually effective in keeping the symptoms under control.

Homeopathy treats not just the symptoms but also the cause of the problem. Its aim is to eventually eliminate the eczema altogether. Treatment is tailored to the patient's particular symptoms so two patients with differing symptoms will probably receive different remedies. In order to avoid a flare-up of the condition, homeopaths will often prescribe a remedy to be taking frequently in a low potency to gently improve the skin.

There are a number of other natural options that can help alleviate the symptoms for all sufferers of eczema:

- Oat baths – put a cupful of porridge oats into an old pop-sock and allow the running water to wash through the oats.
- Chamomile and lavender essential oils – these have soothing properties and 5 drops of each can be added to a bath.
- If the skin is prone to cracking and infection, apply manuka honey to the infected part to soothe and help heal the skin.
- A diet low in dairy, wheat and sugar and high in raw foods (salads, fruit and vegetables) and wholefoods (beans, nuts and seeds) will have a beneficial effect on the skin. Dietary changes alone can result in a significant improvement in eczema.

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- Chronic eczema sufferers are often deficient in essential fatty acids containing omega 3, 6 and 9. Taking a supplement of flax seed or hemp seed oil will moisturise the skin from within and reduce inflammation. One tablespoon a day or a capsule daily is recommended.
- Cleaning products often contain a large number of chemicals which may exacerbate eczema symptoms. Switch to non-chemical brands which are now widely available, and limit use of commercial air fresheners.
- Choose toiletries without artificial ingredients to help your skin and reduce harm to the environment too.
- Wear cotton clothes next to the skin, as man-made fabrics may cause the skin to become hot and itchy.

If you decide to treat your eczema using natural methods you may need to be patient. Long-term sufferers will not experience an overnight cure although you should see some improvement in your symptoms within a few weeks. A combination of dietary changes, supplements and homeopathic treatment is an extremely effective way of dealing with this unpleasant condition.

First published in South Downs Living Magazine, September 2006