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When the Weather Changes, So Does Your Skin

The cold dry months of winter tend to be the most difficult of the year for eczema sufferers. People who have exceptionally dry skin or moderate-to-severe eczema are often very sensitive to falling temperatures. The air becomes very dry since cold air holds less moisture and the heating in some houses can provoke skin dehydration and painful eczema flare-ups.

Since dry skin is more prone to itching or flare-ups, using a humidifier during the winter months can help avoid the dryness that usually results at this time of year.

Bad Hair Day



Commercial soaps, hair products, perfumes, scented lotions, or shaving cream may cause irritation to skin. There is a bit of trial and error to discover which products are less irritating for each individual. It's best to bathe with mild scent-free soaps and try to use as little as possible. Non-soap cleansers may be a good alternative, as they can be less irritating than soaps for some people.

If your scalp is dry, red and irritated, avoid treating your hair with harsh chemicals and speak to your doctor or dermatologist to discuss treatment options.



Hot Tips for Cold Weather!

- Avoid wearing wool and other rough fabrics that can irritate skin
- Dress warmly (preferably in layers) to go outside, and wear a scarf and gloves to protect the sensitive areas of the face and hands
- Don't sit too close to radiators or other heat sources
- Use a humidifier at home and at work to add moisture to dry air
- Stay hydrated by drinking lots of water
- Moisturize! Moisturize! Moisturize!

Ask the Doctor

Hamilton dermatologist, Ronald Vender, MD, FRCPC and Director of Dermatrials Research, has this advice for eczema sufferers wondering if it's time to try a new treatment:



Question:

How long should a patient wait to see results before considering other treatment options?

Answer:

- **Talk to your doctor** – Never make a change to your treatment plan without first consulting your doctor. By offering you some helpful tips or perhaps making adjustments to your current treatment regimen, your doctor may be able to help you get the results you want from your existing medication.
 - **Infection** – Watch for signs of crusting, which can signal the presence of an infection. If you do have an infection, your doctor will have to prescribe either oral or topical antibiotics to treat it. After the infection has cleared, you'll have a better idea of how well your current treatment is working or whether a change in medication may be needed.
 - **Using your medication properly** – If you're not using your medication exactly as directed by your doctor, you won't be getting an accurate picture of what it could and should be doing for your eczema. Apply it as frequently, for the length of time and in the amount recommended by your doctor and then assess your results. You may be pleasantly surprised at the difference it makes. However, sticking to any treatment plan can be challenging, so ask your dermatologist about specific programs that help patients follow their progress with their medication.
 - **Information and support** – Give yourself the best possible chance of success by moisturizing your skin daily and by using all the helpful tips available on the EASE (www.eczemaCanada.ca) and Penny's World (www.pennysWorld.ca) websites. Penny's World is designed specifically for the younger eczema sufferers.
- Eczema is a chronic and recurring condition and many sufferers have become very frustrated in trying to control the disease. According to Dr. Vender newer treatments for atopic dermatitis or eczema offer those dealing with this condition safe and effective treatment. His advice: speak to your doctor and explore the options.



- **Over-the-counter vs. prescription medications** – Over-the-counter (OTC) products may not be effective enough to treat moderate-to-severe eczema symptoms. Talk to your doctor about trying one of the many safe and effective products available by prescription only.
- **Be persistent** – You should allow at least six weeks on a new treatment before you decide whether or not it's working for you. Even if the medication is effective, you may not see the results right away on the surface of your skin. Schedule a follow-up visit with your doctor so you can discuss your progress and make any adjustments to your dosing or other aspects of your treatment plan that may be necessary to get you on the right track.

Stop Scratching!

The itch of eczema makes you scratch, and the scratching then causes damage to the skin. This process is known as the itch-scratch-rash cycle and it can become so severe that it causes sleeplessness, irritability, stress, thickening of the skin, and intense pain. The damage caused by the scratching causes more inflammatory substances to be produced that, in turn, produce more white blood cells to respond to this reaction. The increase in redness and itching makes it harder to resist scratching.

Here are a few tips to help you or your child take control of the endless need to scratch.

- Try lightly slapping or pinching the area. This can give relief without tearing your skin.



- Liberally moisturize with creams or ointments formulated for sensitive skin. Lubricating the skin (especially after bathing) will help minimize the damage caused by scratching.

- Take a cool or lukewarm (not hot) bath. If you use soap, choose a mild one without scent or deodorant, and rinse it off completely.

- Avoid using rough wash cloths or loofahs; pat the skin gently to absorb the water.
- Lay a cold compress over the irritated area.
- Avoid extreme heat and humidity.
- Clothing and bedcovers should be loose, light, and nonirritating. Cotton is the fabric of choice.
- Avoid scratchy fabrics such as wool and rough upholstery.
- Look for a laundry soap that does not irritate your skin. Double rinse your clothing to ensure all of the detergent is removed and remember to always launder newly purchased clothing before wearing.
- Talk to your physician about treatment options to calm your skin and reduce the inflammatory substances that cause the red, itchy skin associated with eczema.

Face to Face with AD

Eczema of the face can be particularly distressing because it is exposed for all to see. Apart from the troublesome itching, sufferers must also cope with how they look and *how they feel they look* to the outside world.

Atopic dermatitis (AD) or eczema may affect the skin around the eyes, eyelids, eyebrows and lashes. Scratching and rubbing the sensitive area around the eyes can cause the skin to change in appearance.

Regular application of moisturizers (emollients) for sensitive skin is important. These may take the form of ointments or creams.



If you or your child suffers from facial eczema, be sure to use a non-drying facial cleanser or soap substitute. Facial moisturizers that are non-comedogenic and oil-free are preferred. Be sure to apply only hypo-allergenic makeup and sunscreens with a minimum SPF 15.

Treatment options are available to soothe the redness and irritation of facial eczema. For more information, speak to your dermatologist.

Myth:

Drinking tea will help dry skin

Fact:

If you are prone to dry skin, then be sure to skip the coffee, tea and soft drinks. Caffeinated beverages can dehydrate the skin. Juices with natural sugars are a great option. Interesting foods to consider are fish and nuts as they enhance your skin's moisture level as are water and decaffeinated coffees, teas or soft drinks.

The EASE Website Has a New Look!



The EASE website has been totally redesigned with you in mind. Getting around the site and finding the information that you are looking for has been made EASIER. We hope you will visit the site often to get the latest news and information on eczema.

Can't find what you're looking for? Let us know what you are interested in learning about. You just may find it on your next visit!

Some of the information provided on the EASE Program website at www.eczemaCanada.ca is only available to registered members of the EASE Program.

Don't miss out.....go to the home page and sign up today so you can begin to access the educational resources available to you through the EASE Program. The EASE Program privacy policy respects your online privacy at all times and is explained in detail on the website.

Interesting Fact: EASE has been awarded the Canadian Dermatology Associations Public Education Award for Excellence for three consecutive years.

Your Dermatologist and You

Effective communication between you and your dermatologist plays a significant role in both finding the right treatment and its level of success for you or your child. The information you provide to, and the questions you ask of your health care professional, will help him or her to determine what treatment is best for you.

It may be helpful to make a list of your questions and concerns before your appointment, so you are well prepared for your doctor's visit. Be sure to provide a complete, accurate medical history about yourself or your child and be prepared to discuss any changes in your eczema or medications.

The next time you see your doctor, make a note to talk about how:

- **eczema affects your life,**
- **you need to avoid certain activities,**
- **often you have eczema flare-ups,**
- **you manage your eczema flare-ups.**



Once you and your doctor have reviewed your condition or your child's condition and medical history, together you should discuss which treatment choices are available. Don't hesitate to ask for advice in evaluating the pros and cons of each and every treatment option and always ask for clarification or further explanation if there is something you don't fully understand.

Join the EASE program!

To become a member and for up to date information on eczema

Visit www.eczemaCanada.ca or call 1 866 432-0362



Eczema- It's Time to Take Control



Penny's EGGs-im-ah



But It Itches So Much!



The Eczema Self-Test