3.8 Eczema: The Itch That Won't Go Away
Human Biology 11

Instructions: You are to read the following information and answer the question on a separate sheet of paper.

Have you been experiencing dry, itchy skin with rashes on your face, inside your elbows, behind your knees, or on your hands and feet? Does scratching cause redness, swelling, cracking, crusting, scaling, or a weeping, clear fluid? Do you often find your skin gets worse and then clears up, only to flare up again days or months later?

If so, you may be suffering from eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis. It’s a common long-term condition that is not contagious, but you may feel uncomfortable and self-conscious about it. The exact cause of atopic dermatitis is unknown, but it's believed to occur when your body's immune system overreacts to an allergen (something you are allergic to). There is also a genetic component, as eczema can run in families.

How can I minimize the itch?

As the saying goes, prevention is the best medicine. One of the best ways of avoiding future episodes of eczema is to prevent dry skin. Here are some helpful tips:

- Don't bathe as often. Try not having a shower or bath for a day or two. Keep your baths or showers to a maximum of 15 or 20 minutes and use lukewarm water, not hot.
- Avoid deodorant and antibacterial soaps, as they may dry your skin further.
- Use mild soaps that clean effectively without removing too much natural oil.
- Soap only your face, underarms, groin, hands, and feet, and use only water elsewhere.
- Pat yourself dry with a towel and moisturize your skin with an oil or cream while it's still wet to seal in the moisture. Ask your pharmacist about lubricating creams.
- Wear smooth-textured cotton clothes to help avoid skin irritation.
- Avoid other irritants such as wool fabrics and harsh soaps or detergents.
• Try not to scratch yourself whenever possible. Keep your nails trimmed and cover itchy areas with a dressing if you can't resist the urge to scratch.
• Stress can also cause flare-ups. Recognize stressful events and look for ways to cope.
• Avoid strenuous exercise that can make you hot, sweaty, and itchy.

What can I do when I experience a flare-up?

Once a flare-up begins, prompt treatment as directed by your doctor is required. Steroid creams, such as hydrocortisone or betamethasone, are helpful in many cases. A new family of medications called topical immunomodulators, such as pimecrolimus and tacrolimus, offers another option for people with moderate-to-severe eczema when other treatments do not work or are not suitable. Speak to your pharmacist about the risks and benefits of treatment and which treatment may be right for you.

Should I see my doctor?

You should visit your doctor in order to rule out other causes for your symptoms. Eczema is very common and often occurs in people who have other allergic disorders such as asthma and allergic rhinitis (hay fever). See your doctor immediately if:
• The itch is very uncomfortable, affecting your sleep or disrupting your routines.
• Your skin becomes extremely painful and breaks open.
• Your skin becomes infected (e.g., you see red streaks and the area feels warm).
• You have tried preventative self-care techniques (such as moisturizers) without success.

Questions:
1.) What is Eczema?
2.) Generally, what can help to reduce Eczema breakouts?
3.) What should you do when a flare-up occurs?
4.) When should you see a doctor?
5.) What was the most interesting thing you learned about Eczema?