

SUPPORT for People Living with Eczema

Eczema Education Series



www.eczemahelp.ca

Psychological Impact of Eczema

When people have trouble with eczema, they often seek help from their dermatologist or family doctor. The doctor can focus on medical strategies to treat the eczema. But often, there are other difficulties that go beyond just the medical effects of the eczema. It is important to also consider **emotional** effects of the eczema.

- He or she may be very self-conscious
- He or she may feel like others are staring
- He or she may feel out of control, wanting to stop itching but not being able to
- He or she may withdraw socially or become depressed

Lots of people have thoughts that creep in when they have eczema

“Everyone is looking at me”

We tend to see differences in our face or skin as bigger than they actually are; think about times when you look in the mirror and see blemishes that no one else notices. What psychologists call “cognitive distortions” can occur, where we think things about ourselves that are exaggerated or untrue (e.g., “I’m hideous!” “Everyone is wondering what that thing is.”).

One way to combat these thoughts is to consider what you would be thinking if you saw someone who looked different. Would you judge her as being a bad person? Would you want to avoid the person? Usually, we are more understanding of others than we are of ourselves. The good news is that most others see you the same way!

“I can’t control the itching”

A common statement from others is to “Just stop scratching!” But we know it is not as simple as that. It is very hard to avoid itching when the urge comes. This leaves the person feeling like they are not in control. Psychologists and other medical providers can work with people to develop other strategies when itching urges come.

“My eczema flares up when I am stressed out.”

There is a connection between stress and many medical conditions. It is important to be aware of this connection, and to take care of yourself when you are feeling extra stress. Things like relaxation, exercise, talking to friends, and simply doing something fun or enjoyable can all help to relieve stress. Mental health professionals can help you develop other ideas to help too.

“I hate how it looks. It makes me feel ugly.”

People often have a hard time when their appearance changes. It’s important to see that the eczema does not define you; you can be a beautiful person (inside and outside) with or without eczema! Your character helps to make you beautiful, not your skin.

It’s OK to seek out help if you are having a hard time coping with your eczema. Many people work with psychologists or counselors when they are stressed by a change in their lives. It’s healthy to get help when you need it. You can call your provincial psychology or counselling association to speak with someone who can help. Help is available!

Common Challenges of Eczema

Adults and children with eczema often have experiences that can make them feel bad. These can include:

• Sleep problems

When people wake up at night due to itching, it can be very frustrating. They often lose out on a good night’s sleep. People who don’t sleep well are often irritable the next day, at risk for headaches, and not as good at solving everyday problems. When children with eczema don’t sleep, often no one in the house sleeps. This can impact the psychological well-being of the parents and siblings as well as the child with eczema.

• Pain management problems

Eczema can be very painful, and can be on the person’s mind all the time. People in constant pain have a hard time getting their daily activities and work done. Sometimes they are more emotional because they get frustrated and tired by the pain.

• Self-confidence problems

Sometimes people feel less self-control because of their eczema (like, not being able to stop itching). Some even feel less attractive because of changes in their skin.

Together, these challenges can leave people feeling anxious, stressed, and even depressed.

There is help! Working with a psychologist who understands these problems can help you manage these feelings better. There are groups in every province that can connect you with someone who can help.

For a most up to date list of resources, www.eczemahelp.ca to find support in your area.

Alberta (PAA)
888-424-0297
www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca

British Columbia (BCPA)
800-730-0522
www.psychologists.bc.ca

Manitoba (MPS)
204-488-7398
<http://mps.ca/find-psychologist/>

Newfoundland and Labrador (APNL)
709-739-5405
www.apnl.ca

New Brunswick (CPNB)
506-382-1994
www.cpnb.ca/en/psychology_finding.aspx

Nova Scotia (APNS)
902-422-9183
apns.ca/search-psychologist

Ontario (OPA)
800-268-0069
opajoomla.knowledge4you.ca/index.php/findpsychologist

Prince Edward Island (PEPEI)
www.peipsychology.org/papei

Quebec (OPQ)
800-363-2644
www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/en/public/index.sn

Saskatchewan (SCP)
306-352-1699
www.skcp.ca

Find a ESC Support Volunteer

ESC Support Volunteers are available by email and can offer support to adults living with eczema, as well as parents of children who suffer with eczema. Visit www.eczema-help.ca and follow the link to **Get Support**.



For additional information or to order treatment guides contact:

Eczema Society of Canada

Telephone: 1-855-ECZEMA-1

Amanda Cresswell-Melville

Executive Director

E-mail: director@eczema-help.ca

www.eczema-help.ca

The medical content within this guide is based on current treatment recommendations by experts in eczema treatment, however, the information contained within should never be used as an exclusive treatment course. Always review your treatment with your own physician.

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