

FACTSHEET



Eczema affects 5 million children and adults in the UK every year.

The Society is the only organisation in the UK devoted to improving the quality of life for people with eczema and their careers.

The Society provides practical support and information on the day-to-day management and treatment of eczema including:

- Confidential telephone and e-mail Helplines
- Fact sheets and information booklets
- Members' information pack and quarterly magazine

The Society also funds vital research into the cause and treatment of eczema and campaigns to influence health services for a better understanding of eczema and its effects.

The National Eczema Society receives no Government or Health Service funding.

The Society relies entirely on donations, legacies and membership subscriptions to fund this vital work.

Eczema & Complementary Medicine

In recent years complementary medicine has become an increasingly popular treatment for many conditions, including eczema. Before going onto talk about complementary medicine it is important to understand exactly what each branch of medicine is.

Conventional Medicine

Conventional treatments for eczema are based upon controlling symptoms with the application of creams and the reduction of environmental triggers and irritants.

Conventional medicine itself is based on scientific research and trials and clinical practice. This means that new ways of treating a condition are thoroughly tested following strict guidelines before they can be used on people. At present, there is no known 'cure' for eczema.

Alternative & complementary medicine

Many types of treatment do not conform to medical knowledge and many of these treatments are backed up by patient-led evidence, which says that they work, rather than medical research.

Diagnosis and treatment is often done in a holistic way by looking at the whole body in relation to the condition.

When a practitioner says that their treatments cannot be used alongside conventional medicines then these are known as 'alternative' medicines whereas if they can be used alongside conventional medicines then they are known as 'complementary'.

Some conventional doctors are happy with the use of certain complementary treatments, as long as conventional treatment does not stop, and the patient is still cared for by the doctor.

Can complementary medicine be used to treat eczema?

As explained above, using complementary treatments for eczema does not necessarily mean that conventional treatments should be stopped. Both forms of treatment can be used together in order to get results.

Complementary medicine is not a cure for eczema. However, many people with eczema use complementary treatments to reduce the impact of eczema on their quality of life.

It can also be useful in helping people to relax, relieve stress and help to control symptoms, therefore possibly reducing requirements for steroid creams and ointments.

There are many different types of complementary treatments available, some of which seem to be more helpful to people with eczema than others. Outlined below are some of the treatments available.

Should you need information about treatments not

mentioned below then please contact the National Eczema Society Information Department. The society also produces an information sheet on Homeopathy, which is available to members.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is based on the concepts of Chinese medicine, having started in China between 8000 and 3000BC. Acupuncture can be effective in helping people with many conditions, including eczema. It aims to restore the balance between the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the individual.

Central to all Chinese medicine is the concept of Qi (also spelt Ki and Chi) which can be described as vital energy or life force. Qi is distributed around the body through a network of inter-connecting channels passing throughout the body.

The aim of acupuncture is to correct imbalances of the flow of Qi energy in the body. Thin sterile needles are inserted into points of the body in order to remove blockages.

The process should be almost painless, though when the needle is put in you will feel a slight pinprick and some sensation of dullness or heaviness around the needle site. Care should be taken if the person having acupuncture has any allergies to metals as the needles could then cause a reaction.

For children (and those with a fear of needles) other methods of treating acupuncture points may include techniques such as massage and tapping or pressure with a round probe.

Shiatsu

Shiatsu shares its beginnings with acupuncture and is also based on the concept of Chinese medicine. Instead of using needles, it involves the use of the fingers, thumbs, elbows, knees and feet to put pressure on certain points on the body.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, these 'acupoints' are where the universal life energy Qi is most concentrated and where it enters around the body.

For those with eczema, it may be useful as relaxation. Stress can often make eczema worse and some people find that Shiatsu can help them to relax, therefore relieving the skin condition.

Herbal Medicine (Phytotherapy)

Herbal medicine, now also known as 'phytotherapy', is use of plants and plant extracts to treat disease. It is the oldest known form of medicine. The medicine used, however, varied according to the local flowers and plants of the geographic area.

Western herbal creams and tablets are generally
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screened in order to reduce the risk of them being toxic and are available in many health food shops. Some of these treatments have provided relief of eczema symptoms for some people.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy uses a wide range of substances including plants and minerals in very small doses. The homeopath sees skin diseases as a symptom of an internal disorder.

When starting treatment, the patient may have a flare-up of symptoms. The flare-up is generally seen as a good sign, since it means that the body is reacting to the homeopathic medicine.

However, when a flare up of eczema starts, it is important to speak to the homeopathic practitioner, in order that the treatment is closely monitored and changes made where necessary.

Aromatherapy

Essential oils are extractions from leaves, flowers, roots, bark or stems of aromatic plants. They can be used in several ways: inhaled, massaged into the skin, dabbed onto pulse points or added to bath water.

Although many forms of essential oils are widely available, people with skin disorders should always contact a trained aromatherapist because many oils can cause skin irritation.

Massage

Massage is usually not advised in skin disease. However for areas of unbroken skin, a light, stroking massage may be a useful aid to relaxation. It is important to prevent the hair follicles becoming inflamed, (folliculitis), which can happen unless skin is massaged in a downwards motion, the same way that the hair grows.

Care must also be taken not to use oils that may cause skin irritation or skin reaction. Instead, it would be better to use your prescribed emollients. Massage can help muscle relaxation and to help the body rid itself of toxins that have built up in the body.

Reflexology

Reflexology is a type of massage. Certain areas on the feet or hands are said to be linked to certain parts of the body and these points can be massaged to bring relief from certain symptoms.

It can be particularly effective for relaxation. As mentioned above, only areas of skin not affected by eczema should be massaged and it is important to avoid using oils that may cause skin irritation.

Hypnosis

Some people with skin problems have found hypno-

sis helpful. It can be used to relieve stress and can be combined with other complementary medicines or conventional treatments.

Whilst having hypnotherapy, the client is encouraged to become deeply relaxed whilst focusing their attention upon 'guided fantasy'.

The therapist aims to help the client to learn to control the undesired itch/scratch symptoms experienced with eczema. In turn, the client can learn to practise self-hypnosis.

Children often find hypnotherapy enjoyable since they have a very rich and vivid imagination so making the most of guided fantasy.

Relaxation And Stress Management

There are many stress management techniques, such as yoga, meditation and relaxation techniques. They can often be helpful in the control of symptoms of eczema, in particular as an aid to sleep and breaking the scratch-itch cycle.

How To Find Safe Treatment

If you would like to try a form of complementary therapy, it is advisable to talk about the issue with your GP. Some treatments are available on the NHS. However, people often choose to go privately if their GP is unable, or unwilling, to refer them to a particular practice.

It is wise to be careful when thinking about complementary treatments. 'Natural' does not necessarily mean safe. Many practitioners are not medically qualified. Training can vary incredibly.

Osteopaths and chiropractors are covered by law but, for example, anyone can set themselves up as an acupuncturist or homeopath. There can be side effects and it is therefore important to be aware of the following questions before starting any form of complementary medicine.

- What training has the practitioner received? Is he or she qualified?
- Is the practitioner registered with a recognised 'umbrella' organisation?
- Does the organisation have a 'Code of Practice'?

The 'umbrella' organisation for each therapy can inform you what training their members have had, their code of ethics, and they can refer you to qualified practitioners in your area.

Listed here are some organisations that can provide you with lists of registered practitioners.

British Acupuncture Council

63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9HQ

T: 020 8735 0400 W: www.acupuncture.org.uk

International Federation of Aromatherapists

182 Chiswick High Road, London W4 1PP

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T: 020 8742 2605

Web: www.int-fed-aromatherapy.co.uk

British Complementary Medical Association

PO Box 5122, Bournemouth, BH8 OWG

T: 0845 345 5977 Web: www.bcma.co.uk

British Hypnotherapy Association

67 Upper Berkeley Street, London W1H 7DH

T: 0207 7723 4443

National Institute of Medical Herbalists

Elm House, 54 Mary Arches Street, Exeter EX4 3BA

Telephone 01392 426022

Web: www.NIMH.org.uk

British Wheel of Yoga

25 Jermyn Street. Sleaford, Lincs NG34 7RU

T: 01529 306851

(Will provide details of a local contact who can provide further information on yoga in your area).

Institute for Complementary Medicine

PO Box 194, London SE16 1QZ

NB send SAE with 2 loose stamps

T: 020 7237 5165 Web: www.icmedicine.co.uk

British Homeopathic Association and Faculty of Homeopathy

Hahnemann House, 29 Park Street West

Luton LU1 3BE Helpline: 08704443950

Web: www.trusthomeopathy.org

Association of Reflexologists

27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1 N3XX

Tel: 0870 567 3320 Web: www.aor.org.uk

(NB C5 SAE for a complete list of Reflexologists.

Contact details of two reflexologists can be provided over the telephone.)

Yoga Therapy Centre

90-92 Pentonville Road, London N1 9HS

Telephone: 0207 837 5050

Web: www.yogatherapy.org

(List of trained practitioners available)

Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine

Garden Studios, Office 5, Ferndale Business Centre

1 Exeter Street, Norwich NR2 4QB

Telephone: 01603 623994

Web: www.rchm.co.uk

Register of Qualified Aromatherapists

PO Box 341, Danbury, Chelmsford

Essex CM3 4UA

Telephone: 01245 227957

Web: www.rqa-uk.org

Further information

For further information please contact the information department at the National Eczema Society.

These details are provided only as a general guide. Individual circumstances differ and the National Eczema Society does not prescribe, give medical advice or endorse products or treatments.

We hope you find the notes helpful but they do not replace, and should not replace, the essential guidance that can be given by your doctor.

Further Information

Eczema Helpline
0800 089 1122
(Mon-Fri 8am to 8pm)
e-mail helpline@eczema.org

To join the NES
020 7281 3553
(Mon-Fri 9am to 5.30pm)
membership@eczema.org
www.eczema.org

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