Introducing the second article in our new series especially for children designed to equip them with vital skills to better manage their eczema in the future.

In the last edition of Exchange, Principal Clinical Psychologist Dr Theresa Wynne and the team at Sheffield Children’s Hospital shared their hints and tips around managing the itch associated with eczema. In this article they look at trigger factors.

Module 2

Time to play detective!

Who (or what) pulled the trigger?

We talked in the last article about TRIGGERS. These are things that cause your skin to flare. Everybody with eczema will notice that some things cause their skin to itch more.

Let’s imagine that your eczema is like a wild runaway horse that can be very difficult to control. Now, imagine that you can begin to take control of the wild horse (your eczema) by taking hold of the reins and pulling the horse in and calming it down. Sound good?

Well, the first step to taking control of your eczema is to avoid the things that your skin is sensitive to. But first we need to play detective and work out what these things – the triggers – are!

You can use a monthly calendar or diary to help you to discover what might be causing your skin to flare. Each week, write down anything different that you do – such as different activities, trying different creams, wearing different clothes, etc. You could also write down if the weather is very hot or cold and see if this causes your skin to flare. Write down any changes in feelings you have – for example, if you are worried, angry or upset about something.

Here is a list of some of the things children with eczema have identified as TRIGGERS. Perhaps some of your triggers will be on the list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When my skin gets dry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If I don’t use my creams</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I use a different bubble bath, soap, shampoo, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If I use hot water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wearing clothes made from wool, polyester, nylon, and acrylic</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting hot and sweaty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eating certain foods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Petting dogs and cats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot weather (making me hot and sweaty)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold weather (making it hotter indoors)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting stressed (worried, angry, frustrated, upset, embarrassed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling tired/ill</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Maybe you would like to add your own TRIGGERS if you have thought of some different ones:

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Goodies versus baddies!

Sometimes, living with eczema can feel a bit like having a tug of war. There will be some things on the side of eczema. These are the things that make your eczema worse and help eczema to win the tug of war. Then there will be some things on the other side that help with your eczema and help you to win the tug of war against eczema!

Can you think of the things on the side of eczema? What about the things that help you to beat the eczema?

You can make your own ‘Tug of War with Eczema’ by writing your ideas down on the picture below.

Maximise your special powers

There are lots of different eczema treatments out there, so there are lots of different ways in which you can help to defeat eczema.

Here is a quick explanation of some of the different treatments for eczema you may already be using:

Emollients - Emollients help to keep your skin well moisturised, reducing dryness and forming a layer of protection over the skin. They need to be used every day alongside a special bath oil and soap substitute or wash.

Antihistamines - These can help you to sleep better at night, if you are having a particularly bad itchy flare-up of your eczema. They are not used all the time.

Steroid creams and ointments - These are the ‘medicine’ creams you may sometimes have to use if your eczema is very red and sore. They are usually only used until the eczema is better. Sometimes you will be given a steroid cream with some antibiotic in it if your skin becomes infected. Your dermatology nurse will show you how to apply these properly.

Wet wrapping - This is a bandaging system used to control the symptoms of eczema. It helps to reduce the amount of itching and may help you to sleep better. The newer bandages are like T-shirts and leggings and feel much more comfortable. Ask your doctor or nurse about these.

AND DON’T FORGET...

It’s not just different treatments that can help you in your tug of war against eczema. You’ve got a whole team behind you!

On your team you might have:

You

Parents

Doctor

Nurse

Specialist

Brothers/

Sisters

Friends

Teachers

Psychologist

Can you think of anyone else?

NEXT ISSUE – we look at the way eczema makes us feel and how we can help to beat it from the inside.