Beating the itch!

The final article in our series especially for children designed to equip them with vital skills to better manage their eczema.

New members will find Modules 1 and 2 in the resources section of new-look www.eczema.org

In previous modules, Principal Clinical Psychologist Dr Theresa Wynne and her team at Sheffield Children’s Hospital shared hints and tips around managing itch and then looked at trigger factors. In this module they talk about how the condition makes us feel.

Module 3  It’s what’s inside that counts!

Eczema doesn’t just affect your skin and body – it also affects how you feel on the inside and how you act. It can affect your FEELINGS, your THOUGHTS and your BEHAVIOUR.

Feelings
Here are some of the things children with eczema might be FEELING (you could circle yes or no as to whether you sometimes have these feelings):

I feel DIFFERENT from other children Yes/No
I am WORRIED that my eczema will get worse and never go away Yes/No
I feel ANGRY that I have to put on creams and can’t do what my friends are doing Yes/No
I ENVY other boys and girls who don’t have eczema Yes/No
I feel EMBARRASSED about my skin – I don’t want anybody to see it Yes/No
I get UPSET when people ask me what is wrong with my skin Yes/No
I feel GUILTY when I have scratched my skin Yes/No
Can you think of any other FEELINGS you have about your eczema?

Thoughts
Our feelings are linked to how we THINK about other people, the world and ourselves.

Here are some THOUGHTS that children with eczema might have (you could circle yes or no as to whether you sometimes have these thoughts):

I’m not as good as other children Yes/No
I can’t do as well as other children Yes/No
It’s not fair – why do I have to have eczema? Yes/No
I don’t want to talk about it – I just want it to go away Yes/No
Nobody understands what I’m going through Yes/No
I can’t stop scratching – what’s the point in trying? Yes/No
Can you think of any other THOUGHTS you have about your eczema?
Behaviour

When we don’t feel good about ourselves and we think negative thoughts like those just mentioned, it can show in our BEHAVIOUR.

Here are a few examples of BEHAVIOUR that can link to unhappy feelings and thoughts (you could circle yes or no as to whether you sometimes show some of these behaviours):

- Poor sleep
- Not joining in with friends
- Not trying new things
- Not talking about feelings or about eczema
- Not wanting to use creams and medicines
- Crying
- Getting angry with other people

Can you think of any BEHAVIOUR you might show that links to how you feel and think about your eczema?

My bag of feelings

Some children find it useful to make a Bag of Feelings about their eczema.

In the bag you could write down or draw any feelings you have about your eczema. Remember there are no right or wrong answers – it’s YOUR Bag of Feelings and you decide what goes in it.
Dealing with teasing and bullying

Unfortunately, there may be times when you experience teasing or bullying. This may or may not have something to do with your eczema. The important thing to remember is that HAVING ECZEMA IS NOT YOUR FAULT AND IT DOES NOT MAKE YOU ANY LESS OF A PERSON.

Here are a few ideas that some children have found useful if they experience teasing or bullying:

- It is very important that you let somebody on your team know if you are being bullied or teased. You might tell your parents, your teacher, your nurse or someone else you trust. They will be able to help the bullying stop and will probably have some ideas about how you can respond to teasing.
- It can be very useful to think of some ways to respond to teasing. You might use HUMOUR or you might IGNORE any comments. Some children find it helps to practice their responses with members of their team.

Here are some examples:

- It's only eczema - you can't catch it!
- That's boring - is it the best you can do?
- Why does my eczema bother you?

- Some children find THE MAGIC BUBBLE very helpful with teasing or people staring. This is where you use the power of your imagination to picture yourself in a very strong see-through bubble, which is invisible to other people. Your magic bubble can be as big as you like and any colour you choose. Whenever anybody says something to you that you don’t like it just bounces straight back off the magic bubble and can’t get through to upset you or make you angry.
- DISTRACT yourself by singing a song to yourself, saying your times-tables or making up a poem.
- Sometimes, being friendly or changing the subject can be helpful. Join in with people. Try to stick with your friends who like you for YOU.
- Remember that you are not the only person who gets teased and that everyone has got something that other people can tease them about.
- Use your body language to give yourself confidence. You could try looking people in the eye, using a loud voice and standing up tall and straight. You can use your body language to look confident on the outside – even if you don’t feel it on the inside!

Positive thinking

Earlier we looked at how eczema can sometimes make us feel and think negatively about ourselves. In this section we are going to look at how you can change some of these negative feelings and thoughts into more positive ones that make you feel good about yourself.

Let’s call this tool POSITIVE THINKING.

Here are some ideas to help you think positive:

- Practice your POSITIVE thoughts every day. They will help you feel stronger to fight the eczema.
- Make a list of all the things you like about yourself. You may be a friendly person, be good at art or football, have a good sense of humour, or be a good listener. Put down anything you can think of and ask others what they like about you. Put these things on your list too.
- Ask yourself…’What would I say to a friend who was feeling upset about their eczema or thinking negative things about themselves?’
- Try not to make assumptions (guesses you are sure are true) about what other people are thinking. People may not even notice your skin. They may ask you about it but it doesn’t mean they are being unkind – they may just be curious or just not understand eczema.

It can help to have a simple explanation ready to give people if they ask about your eczema. Some children choose to say something like ‘It’s just eczema and you can’t catch it’ or ‘It’s like an allergic reaction and the rash goes away after a while.’ Maybe you could practice what you would like to say with a friend or relative.

Imagine you have a coach on your shoulder reminding you that there is much more to you than your eczema. Your coach might be a favourite cartoon character or pop star or someone else you admire. Your coach can remind you to THINK POSITIVE.

Try to remember that everybody has something they would like to change about themselves, whether it is about their skin, their height, their ability to remember their times tables, or whatever! Remember that nobody is perfect!

We hope you’ve enjoyed our Beat the Itch series and would love to hear what you thought of it and if it’s helped you to take control of your eczema. Send all your letters to Exchange, National Eczema Society, Hill House, Highgate Hill, London N19 5NA or email exchange@eczema.org