



Health Talk: Eczema

By: Dr. Rima Sanka



My name is Dr. Rima Sanka and I recently completed my fellowship training at USF in Adult and Pediatric Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. One of the main roles played by allergists is to educate patients on what their true allergies are, how to avoid them, and how to treat and/or cure them so they may live a healthy lifestyle. I hope that this column will answer some of the common questions, verify or refute common allergy myths, and empower you to make positive decisions with regard to your health and allergies.

Atopic Dermatitis or Eczema.

Itchy, dry, red, crusty, flaking, blistering, cracking, oozing, or bleeding skin. Most people think it is just a skin problem. You might not know that the majority of children with eczema have allergic eczema driven by allergies to foods or their environment. They may respond to allergy testing and treatment.

Identifying eczema is important because it is often the first manifestation of the “allergic march”, leading to hay fever and asthma if unchecked.

Eczema is particularly noticeable on face and scalp, neck, inside of elbows, behind knees, and buttocks. Eczema has a hereditary component and often occurs in families with hay fever and asthma.

Allergic diseases such as eczema are a rapidly growing health problem. The incidence is rising, especially in developed countries.

History is important in diagnosing eczema. Family history, diet, lifestyle, allergy history, prescription drugs, chemical or material exposure at home or at work are clues to the cause.

To determine whether eczema is the result of an allergen, your allergist may recommend skin testing. This is a precise, reliable test for IgE antibodies to specific substances. In skin testing, a tiny

amount of the suspected allergen is put onto the skin or into a testing device that pricks the top layer of skin. This puts a small amount of the allergen under the skin. A hive will form at any spot where the person is allergic. This test generally yields a positive or negative result. It is good for quickly learning if a person is allergic to a particular food or not.

In addition, your allergist may test your blood for the levels of antibodies and the numbers of certain types of cells. In eczema, the blood may show an increased number of IgE or eosinophils. Both tests are valuable tools in making the diagnoses of allergy, prescribing treatment, and predicting disease development.

Another test for eczema is skin patch testing. The suspected irritant is applied to the skin and held in place with an adhesive patch. Another patch with nothing is also applied as a control. After 24 to 48 hours, the patch is removed. If the skin under the suspect patch is red and swollen, the patch test result is considered positive and suggests that the person is probably allergic to the suspected irritant.

Occasionally, the diagnosis may also involve a skin biopsy which is a procedure that removes a small piece of the affected skin that is sent for microscopic examination in a pathology labora-

tory.

Skin tests, blood tests and biopsies are not always necessary for eczema diagnosis. However, doctors will sometimes require them in order to identify particular triggers.

Treatment for eczema includes removal of allergens first and foremost. **This means identifying allergens is key.**

Other acceptable treatments include moisturization, gentle cleansers, itch relief medication, environmental and behavioral modification, corticosteroids, antibiotics, immunomodulators, immunosuppressants, light therapy, and alternative therapies.

What else can you do? Studies suggest that delaying the introduction of solid foods until 4-6 months of age and breastfeeding for at least 3 months may decrease one's chance of developing eczema.

Current research is looking into herbal and skin cell growth factors as new treatment approaches for recalcitrant eczema.

Thank you for your interest. Stay tuned for my next few articles covering the following topics: food allergies and drug allergies.

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The Health Advisory

Simple Steps to a Healthier You

Let's face it. Eating right and getting enough physical activity can seem really tough and sometimes absolutely insurmountable. Think about it though, isn't it worth it? As a community, we in the US are twice as likely to be overweight than other communities. We have higher risks of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer and more.

When we decide to get up and change our way of living, we incorporate it not only within our own lifestyle, but also within our children's.

As a responsible and fun publication, CityMasala brings you this column to introduce various ways of staying fit. We will bring tips for both, eating right and staying fit with physical activities that are fun and easy to include into your every day life.

A Few Ideas To Get You Started...

5 Ways to Add 2000 More Steps

1. Park your car the furthest distance from the elevators to work so you have a longer distance to walk.
2. Walk the perimeter aisles in the grocery store before you begin shopping.
3. Replace a 30-minute TV show with a walk with your children instead.
4. Take the stairs instead of the elevator whenever possible.
5. Add 10 more minutes to a regular walk that you may take every day.

5 Ways to Eat 100 Fewer Calories

There are a lot of ways to cut 100 calories from your daily eating pattern that won't leave you hungry or feeling deprived.

1. Choose red sauce rather than cream sauce with your pasta.
2. Replace 8 oz of juice or soft drink with 8 oz. of water.
3. Bake or broil chicken instead of frying.
4. Use 4 egg whites or egg substitute instead of 2 whole eggs.
5. Use 1 tablespoon less butter or margarine in recipes.

5 Ways to Stick to These New Habits

In an overworked and overstressed lifestyle, we may jump at incorporating healthier habits, but how do we stick to them? Here are some ways to do just that.

1. Step One: Choose the new habit wisely.
2. Step Two: Build the new habit into your schedule on a regular basis.
3. Step Three: Enlist support from friends and family so they know about this new habit.
4. Step Four: Set goals and use rewards to reward yourself for reaching your target.
5. Step Five: Check in with yourself to be sure that you're on the right track.