

A GUIDE FOR TEENAGERS WITH ECZEMA

LIVE
YOUR LIFE



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#Eczema

HOW ECZEMA OFTEN IS

“ IT FEELS LONELY ”

> You are not alone with this – nearly 6 million people in the UK have eczema so the chances are that there are a few others in your year group at school that also have it.

“ NO ONE TALKS ABOUT IT AND I DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE AND THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE AS BAD AS ME ANYWAY ”

> Yes, that is true, not enough people talk about it. Do you talk to your friends about it?

“ I HATE MY SKIN, WISHING SO MUCH IT WOULD JUST GO AWAY ”

> Teenagers say they feel isolated with their skin, unable to tell their parents or a close friend how they are feeling.

It's true that most people find fault in their skin, be it acne or darker skin under their eyes, or their eyebrows, or the way hair grows on their face or body. Everyone hates something about the way they look, but we don't tend to share it. We don't share it for many reasons – sometimes we think it is our fault, something we have done, eaten, or not done enough of, so in a way we blame ourselves. Sometimes we don't tell anyone because it feels a bit weird to talk about it and it might be embarrassing. It takes a lot of courage to talk and often we cannot find that courage.

“ I HATE THE FEELING THAT I CAN'T CONTROL IT AND HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT'S GOING TO BE LIKE NEXT WEEK ”

> It is tricky to control and unpredictable and that can be really annoying and frustrating.

Read on because this booklet aims to explain to you what we currently understand about eczema. We hope it will help you to understand your skin and yourself better and that could lead to improvements for you in all aspects of your life.



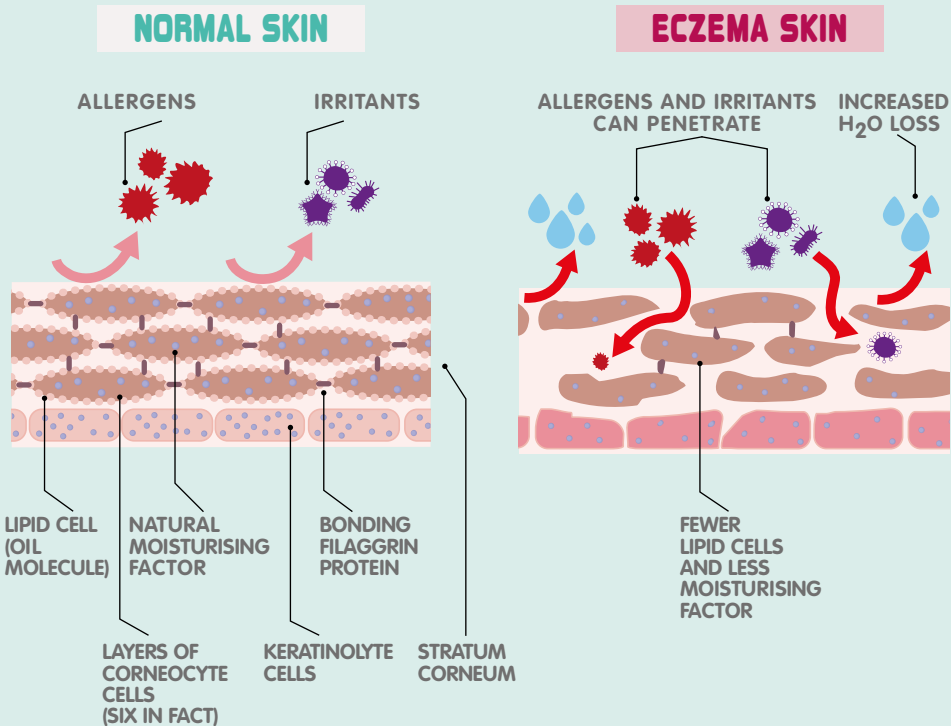
#Why

WHY DO I HAVE ECZEMA?

There are various forms of eczema, but the inherited kind is called 'atopic'. The word 'atopic' means 'out of place', and the word 'eczema' comes from Greek and means 'to boil'. So, far back in ancient times it was a skin condition that was recognised as hot, flaring and unpredictable. Today we have a bit more of an idea of what is happening in the skin.

Atopy is where the body's immune system overreacts to things that would not normally harm us (other atopic conditions are hayfever and asthma, and you or someone in your family may have these too). The skin in atopic eczema is affected by genetic changes. Scientists have identified mutations/changes to one of your chromosomes, which results in microscopic changes in the structure of the skin. The changes in the skin's structure are seen in several ways. Filaggrin, a structural protein in the skin, acts to tie skin cells together in the top layer of the skin (the stratum corneum). In people

with eczema there is often less filaggrin in the skin. There also seems to be less oil in the skin and some skin cells (called corneocytes) have an irregular shape. Together, these structural differences result in a less effective skin barrier which causes the skin to be very dry and allows irritants (e.g. soaps, fragrance, detergents) and allergens (e.g. animal skin, house-dust mite droppings and pollens) to enter the skin and trigger an immune reaction which results in the skin becoming inflamed and itchy. Once the immune system is triggered, it overreacts when an allergen enters the skin and this results in



the red, inflamed, itchy areas you see on your skin.

You can't change the structure of your skin – it is in your genetic coding, so your skin cells replicate and replace themselves identically and that is why eczema cannot be cured. What you can do though is try to avoid irritants and allergens and you can add oil in the form of emollients to the skin to help restore its impaired barrier function. This strategy can bring about big improvements in the skin's condition for most people with eczema.

#Triggers

Triggers vary from person to person and not everyone's eczema is triggered by the same allergen or irritant, but it makes sense to read through the list below and think about making some changes at home to give yourself the best chance of minimising a flare-up.

IN MY ROOM: THE TRIGGER OF HOUSE-DUST MITES

House-dust mites love bedrooms. They live in bedding, carpets and soft furnishings. Although they do not actually cause eczema, house-dust mite droppings can make eczema worse for some people. 80% of people with eczema react on prick tests to house-dust-mite droppings, so that is the chance you have too.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ It is now thought that cleaning will not reduce the numbers of house-dust mite significantly enough to have an effect on your eczema, so only normal cleaning is needed. That does not mean you can leave all your clothes on the floor and never clean your room. It means that you should try to tidy up and dust surfaces in your room with a damp cloth each weekend. Vacuum the floor and under your bed if you can.
- ✓ Washing at 60 °C kills house-dust mites. So it makes sense to bung in the washing machine your bedding and any clothing that is 100% cotton and can withstand that temperature.
- ✓ Special protective bedding covers, duvets and pillows can be used to reduce contact with house-dust mites, but it is unclear at present how effective these are.
- ✓ Freezing also kills house-dust mites. You need to place items in the freezer for about 12 hours to make sure the mites are dead. Think about putting in your jacket overnight once a month or items such as a sleeping bag if heading for a sleepover.

PERFUME

Perfume is a common trigger. It's not just the perfume you wear. Perfume is added to lots of household products: cleaning stuff, washing powders, deodorants, shampoos, candles, incense sticks, plants and flowers. Have a look in your room and try to reduce the amount of fragranced items in the house.

LAUNDRY

It doesn't matter what powder you use to wash your clothes with as any residue – biological or non-biological – in clothing fibres will be an irritant (and washing at over 40 °C kills the enzymes in biological powder). Use very little washing powder – try using a third of the amount they say on the packet and put on an extra rinse cycle. Fabric conditioner is a big 'NO' too. It works by binding to the fibres to make them soft and so will remain in clothing and irritate your skin.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ Do your washing at a high temperature (at least 60 °C) to kill off the house-dust mites.
- ✓ Put your wash through an extra rinse cycle to remove detergent residue.
- ✓ As emollient clogs up washing machines, do an empty wash about once a month at a high temperature, using a biological detergent to cut through the grease.

CLEANING YOUR HOUSE

Cleaning agents such as white vinegar and bicarbonate of soda are really effective for cleaning. You can buy white vinegar in spray bottles in supermarkets, which make it easier to use. Damp dust rather than dry dust, as dry dusting redistributes dust rather than removes it. Steam cleaners may be worth considering if you react badly to cleaning products.

POLLENS AND MOULDS

There are three main types of pollen that can trigger eczema – grass, rape seed and tree pollen. These release pollen at different times of the year. Reactions occur on areas of the skin exposed to the air such as the face, bare legs/arms etc. Pollen sticks easily to sheets and clothing when they are dried outside so dry yours inside or use a tumble drier. During the summer, pollen grains rise into the higher atmosphere in the early morning and then descend towards evening as the temperature begins to fall. So keep your bedroom window closed during the day. You are likely to benefit from a fan at night in warmer weather in addition to keeping your window open.

Mould spores can be a problem and they love a damp environment such as condensation on windows and bathrooms. A weak bleach solution kills mould, so keep an eye out for mould and clean it away if you see it.

TEMPERATURE AND CLIMATE

Our skin plays an important role in regulating our temperature. If you have atopic eczema, your skin barrier will not be as effective as other people's. Many people with eczema find they have an erratic thermostat, being either too hot or too cold, when others around them are just fine.

Central heating, warm bedding, exercising or playing sport may all aggravate your eczema. Wearing loose, cotton clothing and taking a cool shower after sport may help to reduce discomfort. Changes in climate may also affect your skin – this includes colder weather as well as hotter and more humid conditions. Some people find their eczema improves in colder conditions but others find their skin is worse. People with eczema find a room temperature of 16–18 °C best to avoid itching, so think about getting a wall thermometer for your room so you know how near to that you are.

COSMETICS AND TOILETRIES

People with eczema need to be more careful when choosing toiletries. You are at risk of developing allergies and experiencing irritation to any of the added ingredients in products such as shampoos, shower gels, lotions and makeup. Use your emollients to wash your skin and look for perfume-free shampoo for your hair. Try to keep shampoo off your skin as much as possible – it's way better to wash your hair over a basin rather than in the bath or shower.

SHAVING AND HAIR REMOVAL

Avoid shaving foam, astringents and after-shave. If you want to wet shave, do so with an emollient as a soap substitute (many men find that ointment emollients are better for shaving than creams). You can also use your emollients for shaving other areas, such as the bikini area, underarms and legs. Shave in a downwards direction as you would when applying emollients to prevent folliculitis (inflammation/pin-prick infections at the base of the hair follicle).

Epilators and hair regrowth can make the skin more itchy. Hair-removal creams may aggravate your skin so try them out on a small area first. Waxing may be fine – again try with some wax strips first – but some people develop folliculitis with waxing. Electrolysis and laser treatment can induce inflammation in the skin after treatment so this could make your eczema worse. We suggest you try it first on a small area to see how you react.

JEWELLERY, PIERCING AND TATTOOS

Jewellery that contains nickel can cause allergic contact dermatitis and this often first appears around the site of piercings. Although nickel is generally associated with cheap jewellery, it is often mixed with more expensive metals such as gold and silver, although 24-carat gold is safe to wear. Stainless steel also contains nickel, but in good-quality stainless steel the nickel is tightly bound and will not be released.

Permanent tattoos involve injecting dyes into the skin, and people with eczema are at greater risk of suffering an allergic reaction to these and the skin becoming infected. Heat from the tattoo needle and trauma to the skin may also trigger an eczema flare. Tattoos cannot be applied to skin where there is eczema and you cannot scratch them for up to two weeks afterwards.

Avoid black henna tattoos as black henna can be dangerous if you are allergic to paraphenylenediamine (PPD). The problem is that most people don't know if they are allergic to PPD until they have a tattoo and then it's too late and they can have lasting damage from a reaction.

If you decide to risk a tattoo, have a patch test first, although this is no guarantee that the procedure will be problem-free.

STRESS

Stress – in particular exam stress – does seem to make eczema flare up. The best outcome seems to come with planning in advance. Sometimes eczema is managed with stronger treatments to help students over this tricky time. It would be worth discussing options with your doctor a few months before your exams so you have a plan for a bad eczema flare-up. You may also qualify for 'special consideration' by the exam board. The school applies for this when a student is disadvantaged during an exam due to illness, so it may be worth discussing this with your head of year in the lead-up to the exams.

PARTYING AND LATE NIGHTS

You are going to have to pace yourself! Teens report that their eczema flares when they are over-tired after late nights, so plan your recovery time. Sometimes you just can't do it all and you may need to prioritise gatherings and parties. Alcohol can sometimes affect medications so double-check this.

A good site to look up your medications is www.medicines.org.uk

Recreational (illegal) drugs and legal highs often make you hotter and this may aggravate your eczema.

HAIR DYEING

Hair dyes contain a lot of chemicals and many could trigger sensitivity reactions. You may have a reaction on the scalp, neck and face. Symptoms of a reaction include itching and soreness of the skin, urticaria (nettle-like rash), generally feeling unwell and rarely anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction). Vaseline around the hairline can help protect the skin but we would urge you to make sure you test hair dye out on a small area first.

ACNE

Most teenagers develop acne to some degree. The combination of acne and eczema on your face can present problems as many of the acne lotions are drying and can make eczema worse. Topical steroids can also make acne worse. You need to see your GP to get the right treatment.

There are tablets you can take to help with the acne, and creams are going to be better than ointments for a combination of acne and eczema.

#Basics

“ I DON'T SEE THE POINT OF PUTTING ON MY CREAMS – THEY DON'T HELP MUCH ”

➤ They do help, when you use enough.

Now that you know a little bit about the slightly different structure of your skin, you can appreciate that its barrier function is at risk, allowing moisture to leave the skin and irritants, allergens and germs to enter it. Emollients (medical moisturisers) are key to artificially restoring the skin barrier function to your skin. The oil prevents irritants and allergens from entering the skin and kicking off an inflammatory reaction. Emollients do not contain any drugs; they are mainly a mixture of oils and water so you can slap loads on regularly without any worry of side-effects.

BATHING

For most people with eczema showering or bathing for 10 minutes every day is considered best. Don't stay in the bath for longer than 20 minutes as it can make your skin more fragile, which makes it easy to damage when you scratch. Bathe or shower with an emollient – any emollient is fine to use and you simply use it to wash with like you would a liquid soap.

HOW TO APPLY EMOLLIENTS

You need to first wash your hands because they are covered in bacteria. It's a little thing to do but it makes a big difference to a person's eczema... Go on, try it!



No scooping of emollient out of tubs with your fingers! We have all done it, but it risks you adding bacteria to the tubs, which grow and multiply within it. You then spread those microbes on your skin. Use a spoon from your kitchen to scoop it out and then wash the spoon in hot water.





If you use an emollient cream, the best option is to get one in a pump dispenser.



Apply emollient downwards in the direction of hair growth. Do not rub it in. Sit down, wipe your hands on a towel, pick up your phone and catch up with your social media while you wait for the emollient to soak in. Smooth it on in a thin layer, but just thick enough for you to draw a smiley face in it.

You should expect it to take about 10 minutes for all the emollient to soak in.

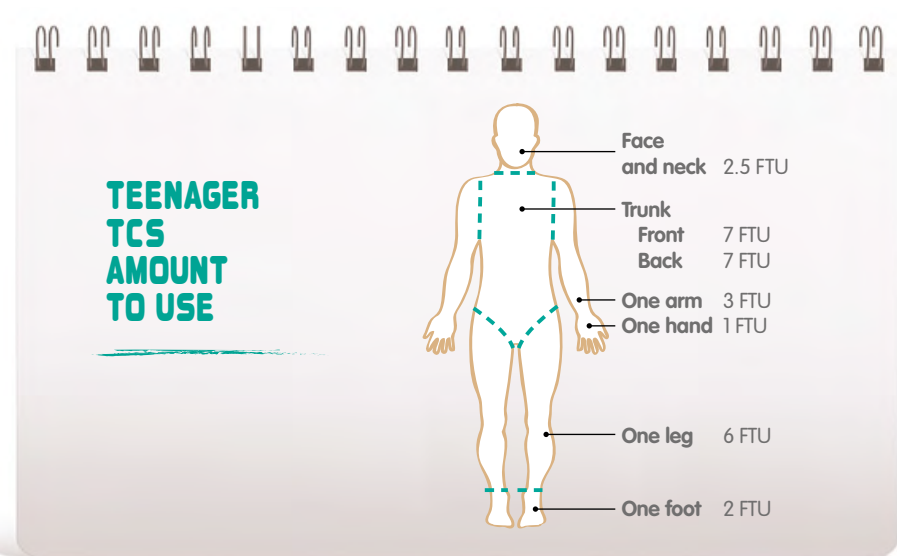
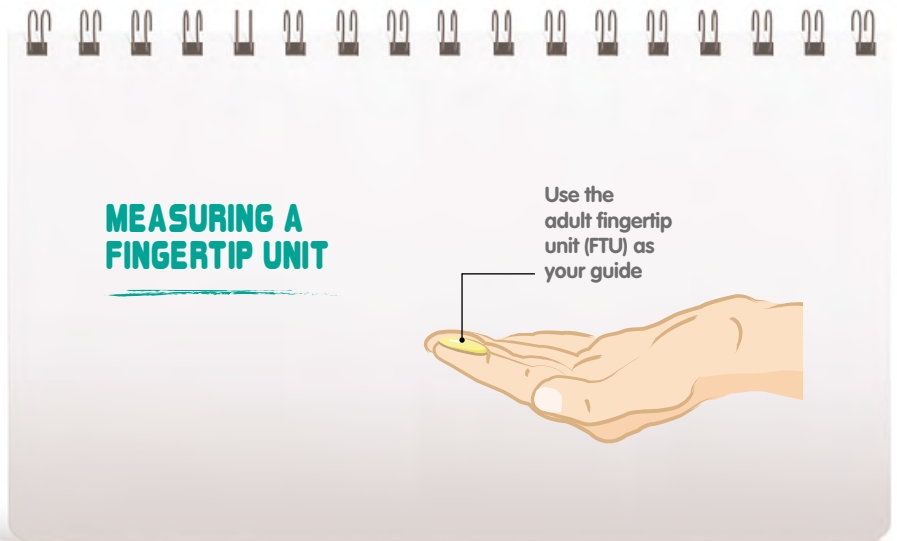
Have a think about how you can do this at least a couple of times a day. If your eczema is really bad then try to step it up to 3–5 times a day.

HOW TO APPLY STEROIDS

Steroid (aka corticosteroid) creams and ointments don't cure eczema, they just calm down the inflamed areas. So put it just on the inflamed areas.

It is quite common for people to worry about using steroids and not use them because of a fear of side-effects. If you use too much or use too strong a potency, then you can suffer with side-effects of skin thinning and stretch marks, but they are safe when used as prescribed and with a bit of care. You need to know the potency of your steroids and where it is safe to apply such potencies, otherwise you could damage your skin. We have a steroids factsheet on our website, which you can download, that has a table with all brands listed so you can check on your potency.

You need only apply steroids once a day. Put them on 30 minutes after your emollient has soaked in. To ensure you are using enough and not too much, check yourself every so often with the fingertip unit measuring method opposite.



NOTE If the topical steroids are not helping you after a week, they are either not the right strength (potency) for the degree of flaring or something else is needed, so it's a trip back to see your doctor.

#Bringonthebigguns

There are other treatments to explore.

WET WRAPPING AT NIGHT

This refers to using two layers of fabric to absorb the friction from scratching. One of the layers is wet and this creates a cooling sensation on the skin as the water slowly evaporates. People find these wraps really relaxing and soothing. The wraps come as clothing garments, such as a long-sleeved top, leggings, socks and gloves. You start by applying emollient really thickly to your skin, as if you are spreading butter icing on a cake. You then soak a layer of the garment in warm water, wring out the excess so it's not actually dripping and get dressed in it (this is a bit tricky as it's wet, but with practice you will find it easier).



You then put the second layer (dry this time) on top. It's as easy as that. The only thing to watch out for are signs of infection, as occluding (covering up) an infection in this way will make it worse. We recommend you try sleeping in wraps if you are itchy at night. Your GP can prescribe these wet wrap garments for you, so go see them if you fancy giving this a try.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ GPs don't often prescribe wraps so they can be a bit rusty with where to find them on their computer prescribing systems (they are found under 'bandaging' and you may need to tell your GP this!).
- ✓ As the wet wrap slowly dries out, you can then become more itchy, so if that happens in the middle of the night, re-wet them using a clean spray gun (like the ones cleaning products come in) but make sure it is absolutely spotlessly cleaned out before you refill it with water.

TOPICAL CALCINEURIN INHIBITORS (TCIS)

This type of treatment comes in a tube just like a topical steroid cream. TCIs contain a drug that modulates the immune system locally in the skin. They are not steroids and there are no concerns over skin thinning, but they do have some other side-effects. At the beginning of treatment you may experience a mild burning sensation after applying the ointment version but this tends to settle after a week or so. You also have to be careful in the sun. You must not use a sun bed and you will need a sunscreen to protect your skin in direct sunlight.

As there is no worry of skin thinning, TCIs are being used increasingly for sensitive skin areas such as the face and groin. On our website we have a factsheet on this treatment, which you can download, and we suggest you read this before speaking to your doctor about this treatment. It's always easier to talk to someone when you understand the subject.

ORAL TREATMENTS

There are five oral treatments available for people with severe eczema. They are called ciclosporin, alitretinoin (used for hands), azathioprine, methotrexate and prednisolone. They all come with some risk of side-effects and therefore require the supervision of a specialist doctor – a dermatologist. Most of the drugs require careful monitoring through blood tests while you are taking them to keep you safe. If you would like more information on ciclosporin, alitretinoin, azathioprine and methotrexate, we suggest you download factsheets on these drugs from our website.



PHOTOTHERAPY

Phototherapy is a special type of light therapy available from a specialist clinic or hospital. It is a treatment option for those with moderate to severe eczema. There are three types of UV treatment – broadband UVB, narrowband UVB and PUVA – and sometimes a combination is used. A course of treatment is given 2–3 times a week for up to 10 weeks. This is different from sunbeds and we would not recommend you try a sunbed as the dose of light is not controlled or regulated. For more information see our factsheet on phototherapy, which you can download from our website.

#Manup

FACT

Most adults are slightly daunted about seeing their doctor. Adults too have thoughts such as: 'Will it be embarrassing if they examine me?' 'Will they ask me awkward questions?' 'Will they help me or dismiss my questions and problem?' The key to overcoming these obstacles and getting a successful doctor's appointment is preparation. When you are well prepared to speak with your doctor, you will find the courage to do so.

STEPS TO GETTING PREPARED

- 1 Figure out what you want to see the doctor about.
- 2 Think it through and write down your questions.
- 3 Practise saying your questions out loud to the mirror or to your parents.
- 4 Consider seeing a GP who is the same gender as yourself. You can request this when you make the appointment.
- 5 Remember it's the doctor's job to help you.
- 6 Arrive in plenty of time for the appointment so you can sit for a few minutes beforehand and calm yourself by breathing slowly and focusing on something in the room.

TIPS FOR SPEAKING CONFIDENTLY

- ✓ If the doctor is making you nervous, just tell them – it can really break the tension.
- ✓ Maintain eye contact with the doctor.
- ✓ Speak slowly and clearly – it's fine to read out your questions from a piece of paper.
- ✓ It's ok to tell the doctor if you need more time to think things through and come back on a different occasion.
- ✓ Try this order of sentences, starting with:

I feel...because...

I would like...

What do you think?

#Can't be arsed

“WHEN I WAKE UP IN THE MORNING, I TAKE A SHOWER AND THEN SIT WITH MY PHONE FOR 10 MINUTES, BUT I JUST CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO PUT ON MY CREAMS”

➤ Staying motivated to apply creams every day is really hard, and adults and children alike struggle with this.

The next part of this booklet uses Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which is an approach to making helpful changes in how we live our lives. Here, ACT is used to help you keep up with your topical treatments (this means your creams/ointments) for reasons that are important to you. You might use it alone or work on it with a friend or parent.

WHY IS IT THAT I PUT ON LESS TOPICAL TREATMENTS THAN MY SKIN NEEDS?

Most people with eczema feel bored or frustrated with putting on their topical treatments. Some say that when their skin isn't so flared they have thoughts like 'There's no point', 'It takes too long', 'Why bother?' and 'I want to do other things'. It is really natural for your mind to come up with reasons to put on less emollient creams in these ways.

Getting too caught up in these thoughts and feelings could mean that you put on less cream/ointment than your skin needs. In the short term you might avoid feeling

frustrated with applying them and forget about your eczema for a while. However, it might start to cost you your skin's health, leading to more eczema flaring. In the long term your eczema might then flare more often, making it even more difficult to start to live life how you want to.

HOW CAN I KEEP UP WITH MY TOPICAL TREATMENTS AND LIVE LIFE?

You might start by clarifying which things are important to you – the things you value most in life. We can call these your values. They might include something to do with the sort of friend you would like to be, the way you want to get along with your parents, or commitment to a hobby or to school.

Example: David wanted to be a more skilful footballer. He wanted to spend longer playing five-a-side with friends. He often skipped applying creams during the day. Eventually his skin became sorer and he had to miss some team training sessions. He made the plan of applying moisturiser at least three times a day and going to more training sessions. He did this and eczema affected his ambitions in football much less.

Like David, if you can connect keeping up with your topical treatments with your values, you might find yourself meeting your goals and living life closer to how you want to.

MORE WAYS TO STAY ON TRACK WITH WHAT I VALUE MOST

You might know what you value but still miss out on applying enough treatment because your thoughts and feelings 'pull you away' from doing them. We have included an ACT for treatment chart with examples to help you develop your own. It can help you keep up with your treatment and stay on track with your values.

Example: Nina was a teenager who felt frustrated that she had eczema that needed topical treatment. She couldn't wear the party top that she wanted. She struggled to motivate herself to apply her creams, often heading off to school without even any moisturiser. However, being sociable and fashionable were very important to her. She used the ACT chart and started putting on more creams. Soon she started to wear more of the clothes that she wanted and she felt more confident at parties with her friends.

> You can download blank ACT charts from our website.

My ACT chart

MY TOP THREE GOALS ARE:

- * GO TO A MUSIC FESTIVAL
- * WEAR A SHORT SKIRT AT NEXT WEEK'S PARTY
- * START APPLYING MY CREAMS THREE TIMES A DAY WITHOUT MUM TELLING ME TO

THESE GOALS ARE IMPORTANT TO ME BECAUSE I VALUE:

- * BEING ADVENTUROUS
- * EXPRESSING MYSELF AND BEING FASHIONABLE
- * CHOOSING MY OWN WAY OF DOING THINGS

EACH DAY OF THE WEEK MY SKIN CARE PLAN IS:

- * TO MOISTURISE: FIRST THING AND THEN AGAIN AT LUNCH TIME (AWKWARD BUT I'M GONNA DO IT).

Add information from your GP or dermatologist here.

- * TO APPLY TREATMENT: E.G. WET WRAP EACH NIGHT.

Add information from your GP or dermatologist here:

You might set phone reminders for certain times of day to help you remember!

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS THAT SOMETIMES PULL ME AWAY FROM THIS PLAN INCLUDE:

Thoughts:

- * IT TAKES TOO LONG

Feelings:

- * FRUSTRATION

TO HELP ME STAY ON TRACK:

- * I CAN LET GO OF THESE THOUGHTS BY NOTICING THEM LIKE CARS PASSING DOWN THE STREET AS I STAND BY THE WINDOW. (IMAGINE THE CAR TAKING AWAY YOUR THOUGHTS.)
- * I CAN PRACTISE ACKNOWLEDGING THESE FEELINGS AND LETTING THEM BE WITH ME BEFORE I LET THEM GO.

THINGS THAT SOME YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ECZEMA DO TO BE MORE WILLING TO APPLY THEIR CREAMS INCLUDE:

- * SNAP CHAT SCANNING
- * CATCHING UP ON NETFLIX OR YOUTUBE

What might you do?

#Awkward questions

WILL CONDOMS BE OK WITH MY ECZEMA?

Condoms are most commonly made from latex and some also contain a substance that kills sperm called a spermicide (although these are being phased out). It is possible to be allergic to either the latex or the spermicide. Allergic reactions can occur up to a few hours later. The reaction may range from a mild irritation to blistering and swelling. If you have a reaction, take an antihistamine as soon as possible, which should reduce your symptoms. If you can tolerate other items that contain latex such as rubber gloves or balloons, it is unlikely you will be allergic to latex in condoms. If you do have problems with latex items, then use latex-free condoms. Femidoms are latex-free and made from polyurethane.

IS THE CONTRACEPTIVE PILL OK TO TAKE?

There is no established link between the contraceptive pill and a worsening of eczema. You can use all eczema treatments while taking the contraceptive pill.

WILL DRINKING ALCOHOL MAKE MY ECZEMA WORSE?

There is no link established between alcohol and eczema. However, the lifestyle associated with alcohol such as partying and staying up late can make your skin worse. When you are drunk or hungover, you are less likely to care for your skin so this could indirectly make the eczema worse. So pace yourself, try not to get overheated when dancing, get plenty of sleep and treat your skin well in-between the parties.

HOW CAN I STOP MY PARENTS CONSTANTLY NAGGING ME ABOUT MY SKIN?

It's hard for parents to let go. Having cared for you during your younger years it is a big adjustment for them to step back and let you be independent. During your teenage years they are learning how to back off just as you are learning how to live as an adult. Be patient with your parents. If you show them they can rely on you to manage your skin, they will stop nagging. Maybe negotiate a point in the week when they can sit down with you for 10 minutes and check with you how your skin is and what it needs for the week ahead, and in return, they try not to say anything to you in-between those meetings.

I CAN'T SEE MYSELF EVER HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WHO WOULD WANT TO MARRY ME?

This is such a common worry – you are really not alone in thinking this. There are

no guarantees in life, but relationships and marriage in particular are based on much more than skin. Many eczema sufferers and their partners will say that their eczema is not an important part of their relationship. People are attracted to each other for many reasons, personality and character being more important. Remember there is so much that goes into making a person. Skin is just a small part of you; why would it bother anyone worth bothering with?

#Working

Let's face it: working out what you want to do when you leave school or college can be a very difficult decision or you may have your heart set on a particular career. Having eczema shouldn't stop you following whatever career you've set your heart on. But it's worth bearing in mind that doing some jobs – especially those that involve working with chemicals and other allergens and irritants – might trigger your eczema or make it worse.

The shortlist of suspects include: hairdresser, builder, butcher, baker, food processor, horticulturalist, farm-worker, masseur, metal worker, motor mechanic, painter, dentist, nurse and printer.

Unfortunately, the armed services, fire brigade and the police can be difficult about taking candidates with a skin problem. Nursing can sometimes be a problem too, because a nurse needs to be constantly washing his/her hands.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act most employers are prevented from discriminating against you just because you have eczema.

You might need to do a bit more planning and research than most people. Talk to your careers adviser and try to get work experience before you decide on a career, so you'll know if it's practical and if you'll enjoy it. Find out about trade bodies and professional organisations and ask if they know if anyone with eczema is doing the job – they may be able to give you tips about how they cope.

#Knowing more

Websites to look at:

- Advice on types of eczema, treatments and how you feel about yourself and your skin www.eczema.org
- Advice on bullying www.kidscape.org.uk
- Advice on how you feel about yourself and your skin www.changingfaces.org.uk
- Advice specifically on allergies such as hayfever www.allergyuk.org
- Advice on psychotherapy and ACT www.skincare.org.uk

#Parents carers

We expect some parents to read this booklet, even if it's secretly, so here are a few tips for them.

Allow your teenager an equal voice in decision making. During these years your child is transitioning to an adult. They are developing their autonomy to treat their skin as they choose. It is important that they have a voice now and so listening to them is very important.

Plant seeds of advice and let them grow. The teenage brain can take about three days to process advice, so do offer advice but don't expect your teen to act on it quickly.

Ignore attitude, temper and sulks and let go of little incidents. Focus forward. Teenagers can't help many of their emotional reactions – it's all part of this stage of development, so try to ignore these.

Responsibility from your teenager must increase during these years so they feel able to cope independently once they are an adult. This process requires you to lessen your involvement. It's time to let them take over the care of their skin and learn from reflecting on mistakes.



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