

Erasing eczema

Scratch more than the surface

Lisa Petty, RHN, RNCP

If you've got eczema, you've probably tried every creme on the market, from prescription medicated formulas to health store products. Although a creme may temporarily relieve the sting, the discomfort of eczema usually returns. That's because a topical approach to eczema doesn't address the source of the problem.

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is an immune response set off by an allergen. Eczema produces dry, sometimes red, cracked, and itchy skin, as a reaction to clothing, an ingredient in beauty products, or a chemical in the water supply. But a food allergy or nutrient deficiency is the most likely cause of persistent raw and flaky skin.

The omega-6 connection

As early as 1930, researchers knew that a deficiency of the essential fatty acid (EFA) omega-6 leads to inflammatory skin conditions such as eczema. More recently, scientists have determined eczema sufferers are unable to adequately convert the omega-6 EFA linoleic acid to gamma-linolenic acid (GLA)—the acid responsible for soothing inflammation. In 2000 *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* reported that modest doses of GLA improve symptoms of eczema,

particularly itching. Borage oil is the best source, so take a minimum of 1,000 mg daily.

Candida, an eczema trigger

Eczema is often associated with the overgrowth of *Candida albicans*, an unfriendly yeast in the digestive system. The consequences of a candida overgrowth include the development of food sensitivities that might trigger a bout of eczema.

Conventional eczema treatments use steroid cremes to soothe irritation, but these cremes also support growth of candida and may trigger another flare up.

Prescription for healing

Work with your health care professional to isolate eczema food triggers. Since you also want to be sure that you have adequate antioxidant protection, increase your daily intake

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of vitamin A to 10,000 IU (if you are pregnant, seek medical advice). Increase vitamin E intake to 800 IU daily.

To promote healing, take 50 to 100 mg of zinc (but no more than 100 mg daily from all sources) and 3,000 mg of vitamin C in divided doses. To restore the balance of power in your digestive system, it's also crucial that you supplement with probiotics like acidophilus and bifidus if you have eczema.

A few ideas for topical relief accompany this article. Finding the source of the allergic response is an essential first step, followed by increased supplementation to correct nutritional deficiencies and end the itch for good. **a**

Three ideas for topical relief

Try any of these ways to sooth the itch of eczema:

Apply evening primrose or camomile ointment directly to the affected area.

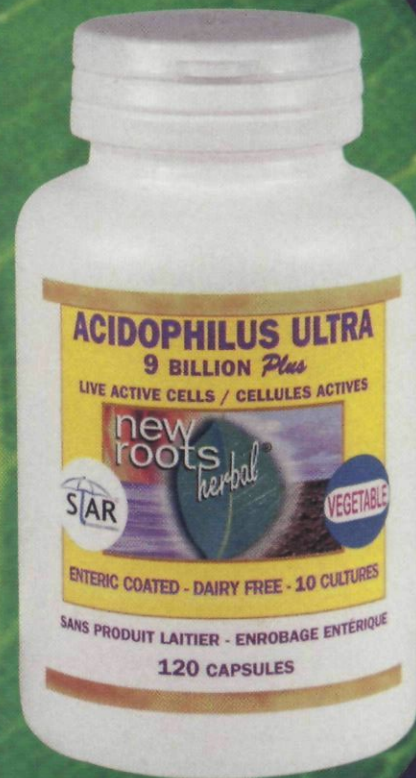
Add 1/4 cup (60 mL) olive oil with 1/4 cup (60 mL) Epsom salts to a warm bath. Or soak in Epsom salts and massage olive oil into skin when you come out of the tub.

Fill the toe of an old stocking with oatmeal and add it to your bathwater. Soak for no more than 15 minutes or your skin will dehydrate further.

Lisa Petty, RHN, RNCP, has won her own battle with eczema. Look for her book *Living Beauty* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2005) for more information about eczema and other skin conditions.

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