Home Remedy and Antibiotics for Eczema

A small, preliminary study published in the journal Pediatrics showed a combination treatment can alleviate symptoms of the painful itchy skin disease called atopic dermatitis, which is the most common of the many forms of eczema. It combines a home remedy—soaking in bath water diluted with laundry bleach—and antibiotics.

Jennifer T. Huang, MD, and colleagues at the Northwestern University, Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago, acknowledged that, along with other pediatricians, they had been advising the diluted bleach baths for some time because they appear to alleviate symptoms and cut down on infections. Their study is the first to include this home remedy.

In an effort to reduce the most troubling complication of atopic dermatitis, all 31 children with eczema who participated were given oral antibiotics for 14 days prior the start of the study. This was to combat the bacterial infection, most often staphylococcus, which can occur when children scratch themselves hard enough to draw blood.

The participants, ages 6 months to 17 years, were then randomly assigned to sit submerged in a bathtub full of water mixed with 1/2 cup of bleach for 5 to 10 minutes twice a week over three months, or a bathtub full of plain water. Only the children in the bleach-bath group were given an antibiotic ointment (mupirocin), which was applied intranasally.

At three months, the children in the bleach-bath group showed greater decrease in the severity in their symptoms and in symptoms of bacterial infections. Huang and colleagues wrote that the next research step should be more studies that assess the efficacy and long-term safety of diluted bleach baths without the addition of antibiotics.

Healthy Ovaries Should Not be Removed

For about 50 years, gynecologists have been recommending the surgical removal of healthy ovaries in women who undergo a hysterectomy for reasons unrelated to cancer. The advice is based on the fact that ovarian cancer is difficult to diagnose until it is advanced, as well as a blatant disregard for the usefulness of the ovaries once a woman has all the children she wants.

A new study shows that this longstanding practice causes two health improvements (fewer cases of ovarian and breast cancers), but more harms (an increased risk of death from all causes, fatal and non-fatal heart disease, and lung cancer). In other words, the women who kept their ovaries lived longer.

The findings are based on data from nearly 30,000 participants of the famed Nurses’ Health Study who had a hysterectomy for benign disease. More than half had a hysterectomy with bilateral oophorectomy (removal of both ovaries); and 44% had a hysterectomy with ovarian conservation. The participants periodically filled out an extensive questionnaire about their health status and were followed over a 24-year period. Results were published this month in the journal Obstetrics & Gynecology.

The women who fared the worst were those who had a bilateral oophorectomy before the age of 50 years and did not go on estrogen replacement therapy. They had an increased risk of all-cause mortality, heart disease, and stroke. “With an approximate 35-year life span after surgery,” estimated the authors, “one additional death would be expected for every nine oophorectomies performed. In no age group was oophorectomy associated with increased survival.”

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