Consulting a Doctor

"She will need to go on steroids." the doctor said, in a somewhat matter-of-fact routine way, as if putting a four year-old on steroids for eczema was the most natural thing in the world. I sighed.

My little lovely daughter was covered in a red rash, from the shoulder to the hands, on both arms: it was so bad that she could not sleep, and it seemed to get worse. It just appeared one day, and within a week she was agonizing and scratching her arms all the time.

"Are you sure? Is there no other way?" The word 'steroids' itself had a sound of something final which was going to last a long time. You had the steroids, and then? What about the body's balance. Was one going to stay on the steroid cream for another ten years?

"Alternatively, I can advise you to apply aqueous cream three times a day and see if there is any improvement. See how it goes and come back in a month's time." She said 'aqueous' and I suddenly thought of horses, mistakenly taking aqueous for 'equus' (equine=horse), and wondered why a cream for horses should be used for children with eczema (reminding of a classic education I suppose).

Armed with my free prescription, I went to Jack, the local chemist, who presented me with this giant jar of white cream, very 'wet' and that smelted of nothing.

The Different Types of Eczema

Eczema, or dermatitis, is the name given to a group of skin conditions. If mild, the skin becomes dry, itchy and hot; when severe, the skin can become broken, blistered and bleeding.

There are several different types of eczema, with different causes and treatments. According to the National Eczema Society they are as follows: atopic eczema, closely linked with asthma and hayfever; allergic contact dermatitis, which is an allergic reaction against given substances such as nickel, perfumes, rubber; irritant contact dermatitis, an allergic reaction against detergents and chemicals; infantile seborrhoeic eczema, found in infants, looks unpleasant but doesn't cause the baby to itch or any other discomfort; adult sebohoerotic eczema, typically in adults between 20-40, seen on scalp, it can spread to other areas; varicose eczema, affects the lower legs; discoid eczema, appears as coin-shaped marks on the lower body, usually in adults.

Treatment

There is no cure for eczema, and there is no guarantee that a child will grow out of it. However, according to research, 60-70% of children affected by eczema will be eczema-free by their teens.

There are a number of treatments that can be applied to keep eczema under control, and the most common are the application of emollients, topical and oral steroids, ultra violet light, reducing the allergens in the home environment (dust mites, chemicals and detergents, use of organic food to avoid pesticides). More and more parents also use complementary therapies in conjunction...
with traditional methods: evening primrose oil and Aromatherapy for example, or Homeopathy.

It is true that eczema, not only is annoying and painful, it is also unsightly. Children being children, in my daughter’s Year Two class this year a girl affected by eczema was commonly referred to as ‘eczema girl’ by some boys, and some of the children wouldn’t play with her at all for fear of catching the condition.

The Holistic Approach

A few years earlier, while examining her poor arms, I was determined that I did not want to take the steroids route: I am a firm believer in the wholeness of the human mind-body-spirit complex and I decided to tackle the problem in a holistic way first.

Firstly, the skin needed to be hydrated constantly, which I did: I religiously applied the aqueous compound five to ten times a day, so that the irritated skin was never dry. A jar would last a week if it did, with the result that basically her skin itched much less. This resulted in better sleep and being able to avoid the trap of obsessing over the problem. Eczema was reduced to a problem to be solved, and seemed somehow under control.

In parallel to this, I found a quiet corner of the house and looked at things from my daughter’s point of view. Admittedly, we weren’t going through the happiest time of our lives: not only did I have a lot of stress, being a mum with two pre-schoolers, but my husband and I were also separating.

I desperately tried to shield the children from the endless discussions and obvious tension between me and their father, but some of the stress had obviously rubbed off onto the children.

I tried to imagine how scary this might have been for a four year-old, and how difficult it was for her (probably impossible) to express such feelings of fear and insecurity. She was bottling things up: eczema was her body’s desperate attempt to say that she was scared.

I remember that the moment I understood this, I cried. I cried until my eyes hurt. Then I decided to take action.

I have practised Reiki for many years, and for me, energy and healing are a way of life. I practise other therapies, such as Reflexology and Aromatherapy, but Energy Healing is my first love, so I chose this healing method over the others.

In the first instance, I created a golden energy field around both my children, to shield them and protect them. I would visualize and strengthen it several times a day. I did use some Aromatherapy, purely to cleanse and invigorate our home environment: soothing lavender and geranium and spiritual frankincense would often gently envelop our home, creating an atmosphere of harmony.

The aqueous cream was having the welcome effect of managing the worst effects of eczema, in reducing the itching: if I wanted eczema to go away, I had to get to the emotional cause, and release the fear.

Every evening, for three months, I rocked my children to sleep, one hand on one child, the other hand on the other, and channelled Reiki for about an hour/40 minutes. I have myself a ‘magnetic’ constitution, meaning that when I place my hands to channel Reiki, very often I ‘feel’ the other person’s emotional state.

When channeling on my daughter, I felt my chest and my skin ‘burning’, and there was a tension which cannot be described as anger, more as frustration. It seemed she couldn’t find her voice.

This intuitive knowledge brought on new developments, as I gradually started to introduce more creative activities with plenty of opportunity for self-expression. We did cooking, painting, made rag dolls and little clothes and greeting cards.

Results didn’t come overnight: in fact, change was gradual and very subtle. A few years have passed since then, three, precisely. It has been a long way. The eczema totally disappeared after nine months, never to return. Funnily enough, the week it all went, a patch of psoriasis appeared on my daughter’s back and then mysteriously disappeared the week after, as if to signal the last eruption.

The emotional signs of the imbalance have taken a little bit longer to heal. My daughter is now a happy seven year-old, with an infectious laughter and a happy disposition, and has finally found her voice in reading and writing. She has a Mum and Dad who love her even if they live apart, and she spends a lot of time with her dad: she knows we both care deeply about our children.

I might be a hippy and a new age eccentric in some people’s eyes, but I am totally convinced that my child is eczema-free today because of the crossfire action I took on body (cream)-mind (creative activities)-spirit (Reiki healing): it was a bit like doing detective work, and it wasn’t easy to uncover some hard truths, but it paid off in the long term.

When I see a child severely affected by eczema, I always talk to the parents and share my experience, but sadly I find that most people are very resistant to the idea of using complementary therapies. Many of them seem to expect that their child will grow out of it just like that, and the child surely will, if helped.

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In conclusion, we never went 'on steroids', and I am proud of the fact that I had the courage to stand by my beliefs and take a small risk. I tried the holistic route and it worked very well for us, although it might not be appropriate for every single case and illness. There are very severe cases where medical intervention and medication are the best thing. It is also wise to ask the GP if the use of complementary therapies will be appropriate.

In our case, Reiki healing worked very well in conjunction with an emollient cream and I am happy I took that leap of faith.

About the Author

Elena Barbiero wrote her first piece when she was about six years-old: she devised and put together a small children's magazine, of which she 'published' numerous copies. Sadly, her little friends were not able to read it, as she was rather precocious in writing and the words she used were too difficult for her 'public'. A collection of poems followed when she was 12, when she won first prize in a poetry competition, and she has been scribbling ever since.

She studied the classics in secondary school in Italy and particularly enjoyed Catullo's poems. After graduating in Social Sciences, she went on working in marketing in publishing, but she felt that her creativity was being restricted. She left and retrained as a Complementary Therapist, which leaves plenty of time for any literary pursuits.

She has been writing poetry, stories and articles for the last 25 years, although she has started publishing articles only recently, having decided that the 'writing bug wasn’t going away, so it was time to do something about it'. She has published articles on Reiki healing, camping and the joys and sorrows of 'single parenthood'.

She lives with her two children, a cat and a part-time dog, whom she looks after: she is a dedicated Mum, and believes that motherhood is a status but foremost a state of mind, which hits you at a given time of your life (maturity, presumably?). Elena Barbiero may be contacted via elebarbie@aol.co.uk

Further Information

Useful contacts for eczema sufferers:
The National Eczema Society, www.eczema.org,
Telephone Helpline: 0870 241 3604; helpline@eczema.org
The Allergy Show, Kensington Olympia, London
www.allergyshow.co.uk
NHS Direct, www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
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