

Bolstering our skin's natural defences during the colder season

CONTENT FROM WINTER SKIN CARE REPORT

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Solutions are available to help you manage atopic dermatitis and enhance your well-being

It's a skin condition experienced by up to 17 per cent¹ of Canadians at some point in their lives, with consequences that can have a significant psychological impact on sufferers and their families. For people with atopic dermatitis (AD), the most common type of eczema, challenges with managing the condition can leave people feeling anxious, stressed and depressed.²

A visit to a doctor can bring answers, relief and improvements in well-being that go much further than alleviating the itching and discomfort that come with the chronic disease.

“People think about eczema as only being skin deep, but it really isn’t,” says Dr. Marissa Joseph, a pediatrician and dermatologist who specializes in inflammatory skin conditions as medical director of the RKS Dermatology Centre at Women’s College Hospital in Toronto.

The coming of winter is especially a good time to talk about eczema management, she says, because seasonal variations can bring dryness and a worsening of symptoms.³ The skin of individuals with AD has a reduced water-holding capacity, as an essential oil is missing.⁴ At the same time, eczema can be exacerbated by the environment.⁵



Winter can bring dryness and worsening of symptoms for skin conditions like eczema.

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Eczema is common in childhood,⁶ she notes, but there’s a “significant burden” of AD in the wider population and many cases of adult-onset eczema. People

with relatively mild eczema can have difficulty and should seek treatment, for instance the hands can be “ravaged” by sores that make it hard to write, she points out. “There are some tangible consequences to eczema that’s not well-controlled.”

A physician can look at the impact of the disease in the individual, she says, and screen for related conditions and complications of the AD.

Dr. Joseph’s recent patients have included a teenager with severe eczema who struggled with mental-health issues and trouble at school, never got a restful sleep and in a private moment told her, “I just wish that I could disappear.” Another found the eczema brought a “huge impairment in quality of life,” including the inability to work and challenges with relationships. And a woman in her sixties complained, “I’ve been itchy my whole life,” but thought there wasn’t anything she could do about her AD.



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DR. MARISSA JOSEPH

Medical Director of the RKS Dermatology Centre at Women's College Hospital in Toronto

“People lose faith sometimes, but there are solutions,” Dr. Joseph says.

Helping such patients begins with being proactive about skin’s moisture barrier management, although “there’s a lot of competing information out there” about how to achieve that, she allows. Some people get the message to bathe infrequently and avoid moisturizers on the skin, “but we recommend the opposite.”⁷ Bathing doesn’t mean using harsh cleansers but simply putting water back on the skin and then applying a moisturizer that’s bland and doesn’t have any color, smell or a lot of preservatives.

Eczema typically has flare-ups,⁸ and while people look for triggers, “there may be no rhyme or reason to them,” she says. “There’s all of these potential irritants and allergens that can affect the skin.” Minimizing exposure to them means using unscented, mild products and avoiding harsh chemicals, fabrics and jewelry against the skin.⁹ “There isn’t a shortlist of identifiable triggers to avoid.”



Consulting your doctor can help with management.

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It's important to see a health-care provider, beginning with your family physician, to talk about what can be done, says Dr. Joseph. This includes “rescue” therapy directed at flare-ups and complications of the disease, like infections, and long-term “maintenance” therapy.¹⁰ “If you’re flaring every month, and it’s affecting your quality of life, then having some sort of maintenance onboard may be helpful.”

“With eczema, many options are available, and I think as time goes on, we’ll have more and more,” says Dr. Joseph, who feels that awareness is critical for

“for a condition that has such a high burden in our society.”

It's important for people to get re-engaged with their health-care providers, reignite the conversation surrounding eczema and seek out specialized resources such as letstalkeczema.ca and materials of the Eczema Society of Canada, she adds. “People need to be empowered with information so that they can advocate for themselves and seek assessment.”

This content is sponsored by a biopharmaceutical company.

¹“Eczema.” Canadian Dermatology Association. Nov 1, 2022. <https://dermatology.ca/public-patients/skin/eczema/>;

²“Eczema and mental health.” Eczema Society of Canada. Nov. 21, 2022. <https://www.eczemahelp.ca/mental-health/>;

³“Winter skin care tips.” Eczema Society of Canada. Nov 1, 2022. <https://www.eczemahelp.ca/blog/winter-skin-care-tips/>;

⁴“Eczema.” Canadian Dermatology Association. Nov 1, 2022. <https://dermatology.ca/public-patients/skin/eczema/>; ⁵“About Eczema.” The Eczema Society of Canada, Nov 1, 2022. <https://www.eczemahelp.ca/about-eczema/>; ⁶“Eczema.” Canadian Dermatology Association. Nov 1, 2022. <https://dermatology.ca/public-patients/skin/eczema/>; ⁷Ibid ; ⁸“About Eczema.” The Eczema Society of Canada, Nov 1, 2022. <https://www.eczemahelp.ca/about-eczema/>; ⁹Ibid ; ¹⁰“Eczema.” Canadian Dermatology Association. Nov 1, 2022. <https://dermatology.ca/public-patients/skin/eczema/>

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