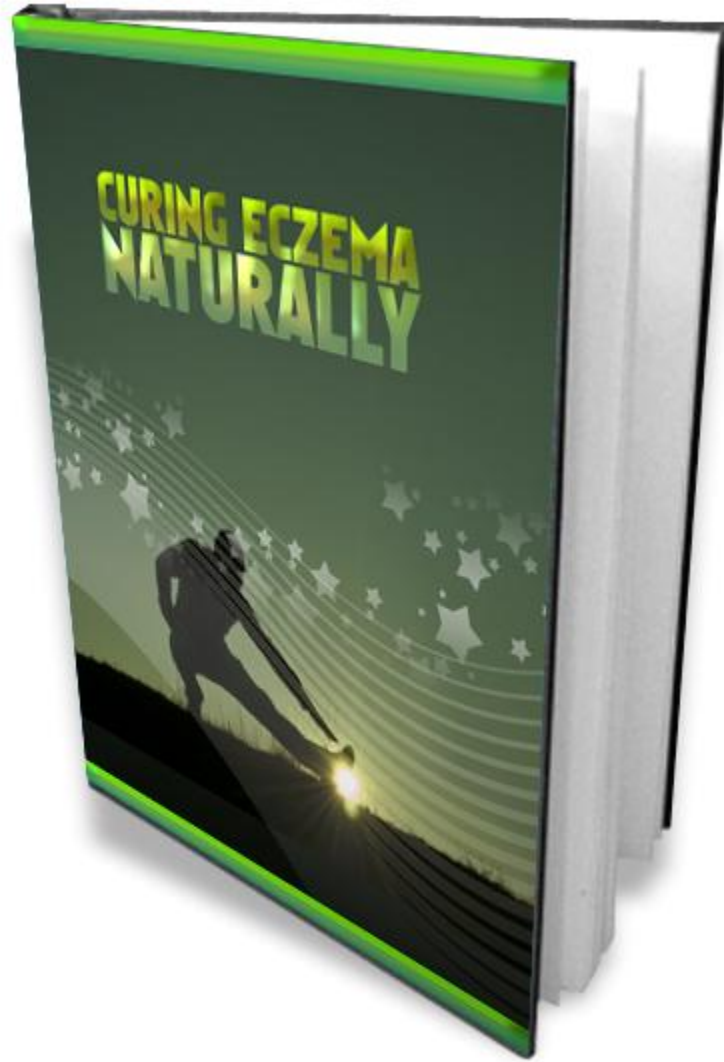


## Dealing with eczema the natural way



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## Introduction

According to the [Merriam-Webster online dictionary](#), eczema is defined as 'an inflammatory condition of the skin characterized by redness, itching and oozing vesicular lesions which become scaly, crusted or hardened'.

This basic dictionary definition immediately gives you some idea that eczema is not a pleasant condition to suffer from.

As you will discover as we go through this book, eczema has been around for thousands of years, but sadly, modern medical science is no nearer to curing eczema than were our forefathers.

Like many skin complaints, eczema is one of those things that most people end up treating on a superficial or skin level, primarily because medical science tends to adopt the same attitude.

However, because we are looking for a way of dealing with eczema totally naturally, many of the solutions you will read of in this book adopt a far more holistic approach to getting rid of or at least minimizing the worst effects of eczema.

While there are lots of things that you can do on a topical level (on the surface) that will reduce the severity of eczema using only natural substances, I'm also going to dig down into some other ways that you can deal with your eczema from the inside, rather than doing so only on an external level.

Before moving on to start looking at various treatments that you can use to deal with your eczema problem, let us look in a little more detail at what the condition is, and who gets it.

# **Eczema is an equal opportunities condition...**

## **What is eczema?**

Like many other skin conditions such as psoriasis and dandruff, there is a great deal about eczema that is still a mystery to us.

For example, because eczema refers to a set of clinical characteristics rather than one particular condition, the definition of the underlying causes of eczema has often been unsystematic and haphazard (at best). Indeed, over the years, there have been many different terms and names that have been used for the condition, as dozens of so-called experts have come up with their own definitions of what eczema is and what it is not.

Partially as a result of this confusion, eczema is a condition that is often mixed up with psoriasis. However, the two conditions are not identical, the main difference between the two being that adult eczema is often found on the [flexor aspect of body joints](#) (those body parts on the inside of a joint that can decrease in size or surface area because of flexing) while psoriasis is generally not found in these particular areas.

What is generally agreed is that eczema is a form of dermatitis. Dermatitis in turn is used as a 'catch-all' term for any inflammation of the epidermis, which is the outermost layer of the human skin.

Consequently, for many non-medical professionals, the two words eczema and dermatitis are almost interchangeable, and (just to confuse things a little further) you will also hear eczema referred to as eczematous dermatitis or dermatitis eczema.

If you are anything like me, all of this extra 'helpful' information will probably do far more to confuse you than provide any clearer picture of what eczema is and what it isn't. This is primarily because all we really know about eczema is that it is an inflammation of the skin, which doesn't really tell you great deal more than you already knew when you started.

## **Who gets eczema?**

The answer to the question is, anyone can suffer from eczema.

While it most commonly starts when someone is a baby or child, it can strike men and women, young and the old, so it is not confined to those who are still in the first few years of life.

Although the condition appears differently from person to person, eczema is generally characterized by dry, red patches on the skin that are extremely itchy. Unfortunately, as the natural tendency is to scratch any itch no matter how much you understand that you shouldn't,

eczema is sometimes known as an 'itch that can cause rashes' because more often than not, when someone scratches an itch, it generates a rash.

In babies and children, eczema generally appears as dry red patches on the cheeks, forehead, scalp, neck, forearms and legs. Fortunately for most children, their eczema will gradually ease as they grow, so that many children who have suffered from eczema as a baby or toddler will have no problems whatsoever when they become adults.

However, there are many factors that can trigger an outbreak of eczema even in adults who have been clear of the condition for many years. When this happens to adults, the dry red skin will commonly be found on the inside of the elbows, knees and less normally on the ankles. At the same time however, the condition can flare up to show many of the characteristics common in childhood eczema.

Being a chronic condition, there is no known cure for eczema although the condition is generally not dangerous. In addition, there are plenty of different ways of treating it.

However, because the main group of sufferers are children who find it very difficult not to scratch, it is not uncommon for youngsters who suffer from eczema to break the skin, making them far more susceptible to infections and other conditions that attack broken skin such as warts.

### **Is there more than one type of eczema?**

The answer is, there are a few different types of eczema, each of which is believed to have different causes. Hence, the cause of eczema depends on the particular type of condition that the sufferer has.

The main types of eczema that you are likely to come across are as follows, with the most widely accepted causes of each different type listed in the description.

**Atopic eczema:** Atopic eczema is the most common form of eczema, which is believed to be a hereditary condition. The condition is sometimes known as infantile eczema, because by the very nature of being hereditary, it is the form of eczema that is most commonly seen in children.

If one parent is an eczema sufferer, or if they suffer from hay fever (the strongest indicator) or asthma, the child has a significantly higher chance of having eczema. In fact, if both parents are eczema sufferers, the chances of their child suffering from the condition are as high as 80%.

It is suggested that if your child suffers from atopic eczema, their immune system is overreacting to some kind of external stimulus such as pollen, dust mites, animal hair or skin flakes, leading to irritated, inflamed and (above all else) itchy skin.

If a child is suffering from atopic eczema, they will exhibit most of the classical eczema conditions mentioned earlier, such as itchy red lesions on the head, neck, scalp and face and the flexor areas of the body.

If these skin lesions are scratched with sufficient severity, it is likely that the skin will bleed, raising the possibility of suffering infections.

Another possible problem is that many eczema sufferers scratch their skin to the extent that their skin can become tough, leathery and hard. Sometimes, these lesions will dry out, causing the dry, flaky skin that is so familiar to people who regularly suffer eczema flare-ups.

Fortunately, none of these particular aspects of suffering atopic eczema represent any kind of serious medical problem, although if the skin is broken and infections enter the body, the story might be very different.

However, as any eczema sufferer will tell you, the itching that is perhaps the best-known 'symptom' of the condition can drive you crazy. Although of course adult eczema sufferers know better than to keep scratching the patches of eczema, this does not mean that they can resist the urge when the itching becomes extreme.

The problem is far worse for children. It is considerably harder to convince a child to stop scratching, particularly as [recent research](#) suggests that there is a scientific basis for believing that scratching an itch does genuinely provide relief.

One other 'symptom' of atopic eczema that is occasionally seen in certain patients is a tendency for children's ears to discharge a mixture of mucus and ear wax or even blood. This will most commonly happen when a child has dry eczema on the surface of or just inside their ears.

This is nothing to be particularly concerned about, nor is it unusual, but if blood is present in the discharge, it may be prudent to seek medical advice so that you can at least establish the cause of the problem.

Finally, as previously suggested, there is strong evidence that atopic eczema is a condition that is exacerbated by a weak immune system. It therefore makes sense to do everything you can to build up the strength of your immune system to help fight against the condition.

**Contact dermatitis:** This is a form of eczema that is caused by contact with irritants that can trigger an eczema flare-up.

The reactions that you might suffer as a contact dermatitis sufferer can be categorized in one of two ways.

In the first example, irritant contact dermatitis is a condition that comes on extremely quickly after you have been exposed to a chemical substance that immediately irritates the skin.

Approximately 75% of all contact dermatitis cases are irritant contact dermatitis. This is associated with the fact that the condition is one of the most common industrial diseases suffered by employees in many industrialized Western countries. It should be no surprise that those who work in heavy industry such as chemical production, iron smelting and the like often suffer contact dermatitis, even if the individual employee has no past track record or family history of similar problems.

The second type of contact dermatitis is known as allergen contact dermatitis, meaning that the individual concerned suffers a delayed reaction to previous contact with an allergen like poison ivy, pollen etc

These two variations of contact dermatitis are not mutually exclusive. Depending on the strength of an individual's immune system, it is quite possible to contract both forms of contact dermatitis at the same time, and possibly atopic eczema might also be seen.

**Xerotic eczema:** This is a rare form of eczema that is caused by dry skin (often seasonal) that has become so dry and cracked that the tell-tale lesions of eczema begin to develop. This particular condition tends to develop in older people, with the main areas that are likely to be affected being the limbs and torso.

**Less common forms of eczema:** In addition to the three most common types of eczema listed above, there are many other less widely known and less common variations of the condition.

These are as follows:

**Dyshidrosis:** This is a condition that only occurs on the palms, the soles of your feet and the side of your fingers. This particular variation of eczema is characterized by tiny bumps known as vesicles and skin cracks that become more itchy during the night than during the daylight hours.

Although it is not common in comparison to atopic or contact eczema, Dyshidrosis is probably the most common hand eczema, one which worsens when the weather gets warmer.

**Discoid eczema:** In contrast to Dyshidrosis, Discoid eczema is a condition that gets worse in the winter, identified by round red lesions, usually on the lower leg, which can either be excessively dry or oozing.

**Neurodermatitis:** This is a condition characterized by itchy lesions of pigmented, thickened eczema which are most commonly caused by continual rubbing and scratching. The cure for this particular form of eczema is straightforward – stop scratching and the condition generally goes away of its own volition!

**Venous eczema:** Venous eczema usually occurs in people who have impaired circulation. It is a condition often seen in people who are over 50 years old, often appearing as a dark, scaly patch of intensely itchy skin in the ankle area.

While this particular form of eczema is not of itself especially dangerous, the condition can sometimes develop into painful and extremely unpleasant leg ulcers, so if you are in the right age group and find dark, itchy patches of skin around your ankles, you should seek medical attention.



## What causes eczema?

### It's often hereditary...

As suggested earlier, it is generally believed that one of the major causes of eczema is a hereditary predisposition to suffering from the condition.

However, there has to be some kind of trigger that causes a flare-up of the itchy red skin lesions that are characteristic of eczema. For example, a flare up of contact dermatitis might be brought on by something as seemingly innocent as wearing rough clothes such as those made from wool or other similarly rough fabrics.

In addition, tobacco smoke, bleach, harsh soaps, pet hair and chemical cosmetics can all trigger an eczema flare up, especially in youngsters who are susceptible to the condition.

Nevertheless, the main cause of most common forms of eczema are hereditary factors, one or both parents having been sufferers from allergic reactions such as asthma - a susceptibility that is somehow passed on to their children.

One strong indication of this is that in the USA, it is generally agreed that [approximately 15% of people \(including young children and babies\)](#) might suffer from eczema. However, for around half of the children included in these statistics, their condition will improve gradually as they get older, so that by adulthood, they are clear of eczema. In this case, most of the children will grow out of their condition between the ages of 5 and 15 years.

Not everyone is fortunate enough to get rid of eczema completely. Adult numbers having a persistent eczema problem in the USA are usually estimated to be around 5.5% of the adult population or around 15 million US citizens. This indicates that only 1 in 3 or even 1 in 4 children will continue to suffer childhood eczema into their adult life.

However, the news is not so encouraging everywhere, as a recent report in one of the UK's main quality broadsheets, the Daily Telegraph, reported that cases of [eczema had risen by 42%](#) in the four years prior to 2005 in the UK. The same study published in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine suggested that as many as 1 in 9 citizens of the UK had suffered eczema at least once in their life.

The study suggested that part of the reason is the modern obsession with soaps and detergents to keep us clean, although it is also probably true to suggest that another reason could be increased awareness of the condition from both medical professionals and patients themselves,

which means more cases of eczema are being brought to medical attention and categorized as eczema than previously.

### **Other causes**

Because so little is really known about eczema, there is a similar lack of detailed scientific knowledge about other things that can bring on an eczema flare-up. As you will read on so many eczema web sites, what causes a major flare-up of the condition in one person will leave another completely untouched. It is therefore extremely difficult to say with any certainty what is likely to trigger an eczema attack in any particular individual.

However, there are many factors which are believed to exacerbate the condition in those who are regular sufferers. There are therefore life changes that you can make that should reduce your tendency to suffer flare-ups of eczema.

Let's consider the most widely stated causes of eczema as a way of starting to investigate how you can deal with your eczema problem completely naturally.

### **Your diet**

As suggested in the introduction to this book, while many medical professionals will deal with a patient's eczema problem on a topical basis, from a 'natural treatment' point of view, it is often better to treat the condition on a 'holistic' whole body basis. Put another way, it is always more effective to deal with a medical condition or problem from the inside out, rather than the other way around, and dealing with eczema is no exception.

There are many foodstuffs that are believed to exacerbate eczema. It is therefore logical to consider changing your diet to remove any of the foodstuffs that are believed to bring on eczema or to make the condition worse.

Before doing so, it is nevertheless necessary to understand that eczema is a condition which affects everybody differently. There is no way that you can know for a fact which of these foodstuffs will affect you in a detrimental way personally, because every individual reacts differently to their own diet.

As the saying puts it, 'one man's meat is another man's poison'. Consequently, there is no way that you can remove any particular type of food from your diet with 100% certainty that doing so will help to alleviate your eczema problem.

Nevertheless, it is generally believed that many of the foods in the following list can make your eczema considerably worse. What you

therefore need to do is experiment, and try removing certain foods from your diet or from the diet of your children if it is they that suffer from eczema.

However, you should remove certain foods from your diet or from that of your family gradually, because if you try to change everything at the same time and you see a marked improvement, you will have little idea of what foodstuffs were previously causing the problem.

While it might be a little frustrating having to be patient while changing your diet, to gain any meaningful results from your 'diet change experiment', you have to change one thing at a time.

This is often referred to as following an elimination diet, where you remove one particular group of foods from your diet and keep that food group out of your diet for a period of least two or three weeks. During this time, you should keep a detailed diary so that you can record what is happening in terms of eczema flare-ups, and other possible problems.

The basic idea is that if your eczema problem improves by a significant margin while you are avoiding certain foodstuffs only to return when you start reintroducing them to your diet, you have isolated a dietary problem that is exacerbating your eczema.

These are the food groups to work on:

**Wheat based products:** Foods like bread, biscuits and pretzels contain wheat flour which is usually rich in gluten. As with all of the other foodstuffs in this list, gluten is believed to cause eczema flare-ups, so experiment by removing gluten-based products from your diet for a period of time. Beverages such as coffee substitutes, beer and root beer may also contain grain as well as yeast, which is another constituent of most bread products as well.

Yeast is a fungus, one that has sometimes been indicated to be a potential cause of eczema. Try removing yeast based products from your diet to see what difference (if any) doing so makes.

**Dairy products:** Perhaps the food group that is most commonly associated with causing eczema is the dairy product family, substances like milk (cows, goats or sheep), as well as foods that contain milk such as yoghurt, cheese and ice cream. It is even suggested that processed foods that contain milk, like chocolate, pastries and soups, should also be avoided because it is so widely accepted that dairy products are often one of the major causes of eczema.

It is believed that babies who are naturally breast-fed are far less likely to suffer from eczema than is a baby who takes formula milk.

If Mum is going to breast-feed, she should reduce the amount of dairy products she consumes during pregnancy. This is because trace elements of the substances that are present in milk which apparently cause outbreaks of eczema (such as whey protein, lactose sugar and casein protein) will be passed from mother to baby if she consumes too many dairy products while pregnant.

**Fish and seafood:** Oily fish like salmon, tuna, trout, mackerel and sardines have all been implicated in causing eczema flare-ups. While oily fish is generally extremely good for you because it contains the essential omega-3 fatty acids (which have been shown to help to combat depression, cancer and heart disease), these fatty acids can sometimes cause problems for eczema sufferers.

However, there are no hard and fast rules about what particular foods will cause an eczema sufferer problems and which will help them. This is particularly true of omega-3 fatty acids, because in many cases, they can help reduce inflammation in every area of the body rather than causing a problem. As eczema is a condition of skin inflammation, it might indeed be that some people will actually benefit from including omega-3 in their diet, rather than suffer adverse side-effects.

Given the degree of uncertainty, if you want to try including fish oil in your diet to increase the levels of omega-3, you must keep a very close record of your results (remember the elimination diet notion).

I would also recommend that you use supplements rather than trying to eat lots of oily fish. This is because many predator oily fish (those that get the omega-3 from eating other fish, like salmon, mackerel and albacore tuna) also tend to eat lots of toxins at the same time.

As an example, it is increasingly common for salmon and tuna to be very high in mercury and dioxins, so if you want to include larger amounts of omega-3 in your diet, use provably safe supplements to do so.

In this same group, it is also believed that crustaceans such as lobster, crab, prawns and crayfish as well as mollusks (clams, oysters, mussels etc) might be foodstuffs to avoid. In fact, while the jury is probably out on whether eating oily fish is good for someone who suffers from eczema, there can be little doubt that shellfish and crustaceans are almost always a problem for people who have eczema.

**Acidic fruits:** Research has indicated that including acidic fruits such as cranberries, blueberries and currants will cause an increased level of eczema affected skin production in many sufferers.

Canned or glazed fruits will often cause problems as well, primarily because in the canning or glazing process, artificial preservatives are very commonly used.

**Nuts:** All 'true' nuts like almonds, pistachios, cushion nuts, hazelnuts and walnuts have the ability to make eczema far worse if they are included in your diet.

[Peanuts](#) are often believed to cause problems for anyone who has eczema, despite the fact that a peanut is not in fact a nut at all (it's a legume, similar to beans and peas).

For people who find themselves particularly susceptible to peanuts as a cause of eczema, it is essential that you check processed or pre-packed foods for peanut traces. While the practice of including peanut extract or traces in processed or pre-packed foods has significantly decreased in the past few years, you should still check to make sure anything you eat does not contain peanut residue if peanuts are a big problem.

**Eggs:** Eggs and other foodstuffs that are either based on or use eggs in the creation or manufacturing process should be avoided as well. As an example, cakes often contain eggs, so cakes should be avoided.

Egg allergies are common, with [some sources](#) suggesting that an allergy to eggs and egg materials is one of the most common causes of atopic eczema in children.

Don't forget the idea of the elimination diet. If you suspect that eggs are causing a problem, cut them out of your diet for a period of time, before reintroducing them a little further down the line. If your eczema problems reappear, you have a much clearer picture of what is causing you difficulties.

**Food additives, colorings and preservatives:** Many of the better-known and more commonly used food additives, colorings and preservatives can also cause your eczema to flare-up.

It is a fact of modern life that the majority of foods we eat and beverages we drink include preservatives or additives of some description, but as far as possible, you should try to avoid consuming foods or drinks that are laden with chemical additives.

As an example, substances like [tartrazine](#), [monosodium glutamate](#) and [sodium benzoate](#) are all known to be capable of irritating your system to the extent that you suffer a flare-up of eczema.

None of these chemical-based food additives could ever be considered to be natural. It therefore follows that if you are trying to get rid of your eczema problem completely naturally, you should avoid foods with these preservatives or colorings in them.

## Allergy testing to establish what causes eczema

As suggested previously, it is generally agreed that one of the most common causes of eczema is an allergic reaction or the fact that a particular person is especially susceptible to particular allergens such as tree pollen, pet hair etc.

Furthermore, we established in the previous chapter that many eczema sufferers are prone to allergic reactions to certain foodstuffs which can prompt a flare-up of the condition at any time.

I have mentioned that one way of discovering what particular foodstuffs or beverages cause you eczema problems is to keep a journal of your elimination diet.

Doing things this way has the advantage that you can do everything in the comfort of your own home and there is no need to spend money for anything other than the diary that you use.

There is another way of establishing exactly what it is that causes you to break out in eczema, which is to take [an allergy test](#) under medical supervision. This test should show you exactly what it is that you are allergic to, although it might take some time to see positive results, because the allergist with whom you are working might have identified many different allergens which you could be reacting to, meaning that their testing might be a slow process.

On the other hand, taking an allergy test is not only effective for highlighting those foodstuffs or chemicals in food that you react against. It will also highlight any non-dietary factors that might be causing your eczema, such as an allergy to dust mites, tobacco smoke or even to the chemicals in strong soap and detergents.

In short, allergy testing is a far more comprehensive way of isolating exactly what is causing your eczema problem, because in addition to establishing allergies, an allergy test will also establish an individual's personal reactions to various allergens such as tree pollen, molds or medications.

On the other hand, because allergy testing only establishes that the tested individual has a specific allergic antibody to the particular substance being tested, it does not necessarily mean that an allergic reaction is the inevitable result of the presence of these antibodies.

For example, while an allergy test might establish that a particular individual has antibodies that are likely to react against substances like pet hair or dust mites, it does not necessarily follow that they will automatically be allergic or react to these particular allergens.

Consequently, if you are going to use allergy testing to establish what causes your eczema problem, you need to have a test that can be analyzed and interpreted by a qualified [board certified allergist](#) (in the USA – qualified UK allergists are [listed here](#)).

When you first start working with an allergist, it is likely that they will ask you many questions about your lifestyle in efforts to establish the most likely causes of your adverse reactions to allergens, foodstuffs that you are allergic to and so on. For example, they will ask about your family background - because as we have already established, problems like eczema are generally believed to have an inherent hereditary element.

In general, there are only two types of allergy testing that are commonly accepted as being scientifically valid for anything other than experimental research purposes.

The first of these is the skin test, which has been in use for 100 years and is still the preferred method of allergy testing even today. In this situation, the qualified practitioner places a small drop of a commercially prepared solution containing the allergen to which the patient is thought to be allergic on the skin before scratching the skin so that the allergen enters the body.

When they do this, the allergist will be looking for a certain degree or level of reaction from the patient to prove that they are sensitive to a particular allergen. However, because the initial allergen solution is very weak, it is quite common for the allergist to run several skin tests using slightly stronger allergen solutions to establish the degree of adverse reaction the patient will suffer.

The allergist is artificially inducing an allergic disease in miniature. If the initial test on the outside of the skin is not effective for establishing exactly what it is that is causing some kind of negative reaction, a similar test will be run by injecting the allergen solution under the skin.

The alternative form of allergy testing is known as [Radioallergosorbent testing \(RAST\)](#), which is a test for specific allergic antibodies in the blood, a test which is gradually improving in scope and accuracy. However, because RAST is considerably more expensive than skin testing and because the results often take days or even weeks to arrive, it is still skin testing that is by far the most popular form of allergy test.

With an allergy test, you may be able to create a far clearer picture of why you suffer eczema or other complaints that are more common in those who seem to be more prone to allergic reactions. Armed with this information, it becomes considerably easier to establish the changes

that you need to make in your life in order to reduce your susceptibility (or that of your children) to eczema.



## Medical treatments for eczema

Clinical diagnosis of eczema is most commonly based on the appearance of a patient's skin and on their family and personal history. However, because there are many similar conditions to eczema (e.g. psoriasis), your medical practitioner will have to examine your skin lesions in order to rule out alternative problems.

They may even need to carry out a [skin lesion biopsy](#) to establish exactly what you are suffering from, although in most cases this is unlikely to be necessary.

Once your medical practitioner has established that you are indeed suffering from eczema, it is likely that they will recommend various courses of action depending upon the severity of your eczema problem.

Nevertheless, irrespective of what kind of treatment they prescribe for you, the ultimate objectives of the treatment will always be the same:

- To control and reduce itching;
- To reduce skin inflammation;
- To loosen and then remove scaly skin lesions;
- To reduce the outbreak of new lesions; and
- To clear any infection that has already set in.

There are many strategies that your medical practitioner may recommend you should adopt as a way of reducing the severity of your problem, ranging from moisturizing your skin (more of which later), applying topical pharmaceuticals, or in more serious cases, they may even recommend oral medications.

Most commonly, the medications that will be prescribed for treating your eczema are likely to be based on [corticosteroids](#), a type of steroid hormone that is naturally produced in the adrenal cortex.

As a first option, most medical practitioners will recommend a topical cream or ointment that is based on corticosteroids as a first-line treatment for eczema. Many such corticosteroid creams can be bought across the counter without a prescription in Western countries, which suggests (quite correctly) that the creams that you buy are not especially strong.

They are unlikely to have any particularly adverse side-effects either, but their effectiveness may be fairly limited.

If your condition continues to deteriorate or does not improve, your doctor may prescribe you a corticosteroid cream or lotion, meaning that

this particular topical treatment is likely to be considerably stronger than those that you buy across the counter.

It is widely accepted within the medical community that long-term usage of corticosteroids can have adverse side-effects, such as irreversible skin thinning. Consequently, if your doctor prescribes topical corticosteroid based lotions or creams, it is likely that they will recommend that you only use them for a short period of time.

The third corticosteroid-based option is for your medical practitioner to recommend oral corticosteroid drugs such as [prednisone](#) or [prednisolone](#). While the potential adverse side effects of taking these drugs will depend upon the strength of the drug you are taking and the period of time you have to take it for, there are widely recognized adverse side-effects of long-term use of drugs like these.

For example, scroll down the prednisolone page highlighted above and you will see that listed amongst the potential side-effects are weight gain, high blood pressure, worsening of diabetes, glaucoma, diabetes, growth retardation in children and psychic disturbances.

While it is fair to say that it would only be in the most serious of circumstances that a medical practitioner would prescribe a long-term use of corticosteroid drugs like these, it is not impossible that some doctors might do so. Hence, you need to be aware of the dangers of corticosteroid drugs, and if at all possible, avoid using them.

Other pharmaceuticals that might be prescribed by your doctor would be antibiotics in a situation where by scratching the eczema affected areas of your skin you have caused an infection.

When you suffer severe itching as a result of your eczema, you might want to use [antihistamines](#) to reduce the severity, with antihistamine-based products being available both across the counter and by prescription.

However, if you are going to use antihistamines, be aware that one of the effects of taking this particular class of drug is that they cause drowsiness. Hence, it is best to take them at night before retiring to ensure that you get a good night's sleep. Never be tempted to take them if you are driving, or operating machinery as part of your job.

Finally, a few years ago, the FDA approved two new drugs that belong to the class known as [calcineurin inhibitors](#), drugs that suppress the activity of your immune system as a way of reducing the worst effects of conditions like eczema.

The two best known 'types' of drugs of this nature are [Pimecrolimus](#) (Elidel) and [Tacrolimus](#) (Protopic), but because these drugs are still

new, there is not as yet a great deal of scientific evidence about any adverse side-effects.

It has [been suggested that avoidance of using them](#) helps the kidneys of renal transplant patients to function far more efficiently, which would point to the likelihood that there are possible side-effects.

Claims that applying these drugs to the skin can also [cause burning and discomfort for several days](#), with less common side-effects being listed as acne, headaches and possible flu-like symptoms, are a little worrying.

In fact, the same article goes on to suggest that the FDA has now issued a warning about possible links between topically applied calcineurin inhibitors and cancer. There seems little doubt that like so many that have gone before, the possible long-term adverse effects of these particular pharmaceuticals mean that they are not the much heralded 'wonder drug' that they might have appeared to be at first.

From this chapter, one thing should have become abundantly clear.

While your medical practitioner might be able to recommend many chemical-based pharmaceutical treatments for eczema, you would not necessarily want to use any of these particular methods of treatment given the potential adverse side-effects that are inherent in using chemical-based pharmaceuticals.

Because the majority of eczema sufferers have an intermittent problem that is not especially serious apart from the highly irritating itching, even medical practitioners are often happy to recommend natural solutions that you can try to get rid of the problem before turning to pharmaceuticals.

Let us consider some of these natural options next.

## Natural ways of dealing with eczema

### Moisture is the key

If you are an eczema sufferer who does not have a particularly serious condition, it is possible that you can minimize the effects of eczema to an acceptable level with some practical home-based 'treatments'.

As an example, once you have established what it is that causes you to suffer flare-ups (e.g. exposure to pollen or food allergies), the answer is to avoid putting yourself in a position of risk. Once you know that it is eggs or milk or nuts that cause your problem, all you have to do is to avoid eating them or try staying inside at the height of spring and summer when the pollen count is at its highest.

Given that eczema is a condition that is characterized by dry skin, it is logical that anything that reduces your dry skin is an effective way of dealing with your problem.

For this reason, you should always bathe for as short a time as possible, while also reducing the amount of soap that you use during the bathing process. It will probably be more effective to use a natural moisturizing oil like tea tree oil in your bath because this will help to keep your skin moist and supple.

Once you get out of the bath, it is essential that you try to retain as much moisture in your skin as possible, applying natural moisturizers such as olive or tea tree oil to all the dry areas of your skin. Try to do this within three minutes of getting out of your bath, because by doing so, you ensure that you are applying moisturizer to skin that is still moist and therefore flexible.

You can further increase the benefits of this particular strategy by wrapping any dry skin areas to which you have applied moisturizer with plastic bags that will prevent your skin drying out for the maximum length of time.

The primary advantages of using either olive or tea tree oil as a moisturizer is that both of these substances are easy to get hold of.

As with all aspects of dealing with eczema, while these particular moisturizers are highly effective for most people, they may not work for you. Consequently, you might like to consider some alternative moisturizers made from completely natural substances:

**Vitamin E oil:** Vitamin E oil is famous for its ability to hydrate the skin while promoting healing at the same time. This particular moisturizing oil helps to protect cell membranes while also promoting the body's

ability to use vitamin K and selenium. Also, because of its antioxidant qualities, it provides another level of protection for your skin.

**Vinca Minor:** [Vinca minor](#) is a homoeopathic moisturizing solution that is highly effective for relieving sensitive, sore or itchy skin. It is therefore ideal for anyone who suffers from eczema to use as a moisturizer, because dry and itchy skin is probably the most common characteristic of the eczema sufferer.

**Hydrocotyle Asiatica:** [Hydrocotyle](#) is an aquatic plant with between 75 and 100 species included under this one major 'heading'. However, as a herbal remedy, it has been used for many centuries because of its wound healing capabilities and its ability to aid skin rejuvenation. You may be able to find moisturizing solutions containing this herb, but if not, try to find the herb online and infuse it into a mild unscented baby oil to make your own moisturizing solution.

**Calendula:** [Calendula](#) is an ancient medicinal herb which helps to treat dry and damaged skin which is also excellent for minimizing the effects of eczema and psoriasis. In suspension and used topically, calendula is highly effective for reducing skin inflammation while also soothing irritated tissue.

If you run an online search for calendula, you will find plenty of places where you can buy plants or at least the extract so that you can make your own soothing, moisturizing lotion or oil yourself. Failing this, you might consider buying a commercially produced calendula salve [like this one](#).

The bottom line is that the more often or regularly you can moisturize the affected areas of your skin, the less of a problem you are likely to have. Hence, whenever you have washed away layers of moisture from your skin by bathing or showering, you need to replace that moisture each time.

### **Blowing hot and cold...**

Another potential cause of eczema that you should try to avoid whenever possible is extremes of heat or cold. While to a certain extent your ability to do this will depend upon where you are located, it is nevertheless a fact that many people find extremes of temperature encourage outbreaks of eczema.

By avoiding temperature extremes, you therefore remove another potential cause of a breakout of eczema.

## **Avoiding stress**

### **Just take it easy...**

It is an established fact that people who suffer from stress and tension are likely to exacerbate any pre-existing chronic medical conditions that they have like eczema and psoriasis because they allow their emotions to run away with them.

If you can reduce stress levels in your life, you will give yourself a far better chance of avoiding further outbreaks of eczema.

The first thing you can do to reduce the amount of stress you have to put up with on a daily basis is to change your life so that you don't put yourself in situations where you are going to be stressed.

For example, if you are the kind of person who ends up running to the subway or railway station every morning for the very last train that will get you to work on time, try getting out of bed 10 minutes earlier so that you can catch a subway or train that is not so desperately last minute.

If you are always too rushed to eat properly because you hang around the office during your break times, try to get away for 30 minutes or an hour so that you are completely removed from the stress filled environment of work. If you can find somewhere that is peaceful and relaxed to go to during your break, that's even better. Sitting in the park feeding the ducks is going to be less stressful than fighting your way to the front of the queue in the local burger or fried food joint.

Try to plan your meals at home in advance as well. By doing so, you ensure that you do not spend every evening immediately after leaving the office having to dash to the mall or convenience store to find food for the family dinner.

If you are almost always at the beck and call of your family, try to set aside some time for yourself, time when you can relax and perhaps even pamper yourself. While it is absolutely commendable that you are going to do everything you can to help everyone else, you must realize that living your life at Mach 3 is going to damage your health.

When that happens, how will you be able to help and look after others when you are sick?

Stress always floods your body with 'flight or fight' chemicals, which is extremely useful in genuine emergency situations. However, once it becomes a constant factor of your life, it gradually wears you down and further damages your immune system (which as an eczema sufferer is probably in a pretty poor shape anyway) as it does so.

On the other hand, it is inevitable that if you slow down your everyday lifestyle, you will reduce the stress levels that you have to put up with on a daily basis as well. When you do this, difficulties which are exacerbated by stress like eczema are likely to become far less problematical for you.

What we are talking about here is a complete reassessment of your life.

You must give yourself the time to take a step back so that you are able to assess everything you do in your normal day-to-day life, because it is only by knowing what you're doing that you can begin to change it.

A daily journal would be invaluable so that you can really see what you do every day. Armed with this information, you can start making the necessary changes to reduce stress levels in your life.

### **Specific training to minimize stress**

In addition to modifying your everyday lifestyle in an effort to reduce the amount of stress that is undoubtedly exacerbating your eczema problem, there are several things that you can learn which might help you to be able to de-stress even further.

In order to learn practices like yoga, it was not all that long ago that you had to go to organized classes which would have cost money, but it is now possible to pick up most of the information that you need from the internet completely free.

This is well worth doing, because practices like yoga have a long history of being used for relaxation as well as for exercise and building strength.

To find as much information as you need about how to start learning to relax properly using yoga, all you need to do is search a major engine like Google using a term like 'learning yoga':

Results 1 - 10 of about 890,000 for [learning yoga](#).

Or you could look for information about 'yoga for relaxation':

Results 1 - 10 of about 314,000 for [yoga for relaxation](#).

There really is no shortage of yoga information available online, so you can learn everything you need to know in the comfort of your own home.

Try combining yoga with other broadly accepted practices for slowing down your life and reducing stress - like learning meditation, how to breathe properly and so on. By doing so, you can build your own daily relaxation routine that you can use to calm yourself down any time stress levels start to climb.

Remember that this is not about becoming a fully fledged yogi or acknowledge expert in meditation, unless of course you want to. The main focus of what you are doing is to learn new ideas and techniques to ensure that you are always as calm and relaxed as possible.

It is not therefore absolutely necessary to adopt any particular practice in order to achieve a relaxed state, as long as what you find works for you.

For example, the relaxation program set out on [this webpage](#) is a combination of many different ideas such as yoga, meditation and deep breathing, but at the same time, it is not focused on blind adherence to any particular relaxation regime or stress management ideas. Give it a try, because it works to me, so who knows how much benefit you might get out of adopting the same relaxation techniques?



## Eating to get rid of eczema

As suggested earlier, there are lots of different foodstuffs and beverages to avoid, things that might cause your condition to flare up if you suffer from eczema.

On the other side of the food argument, there are plenty of nutrients that you should definitely include in your diet if you want to minimize the more unpleasant effects of eczema. You must ensure that your diet is rich in the necessary nutrients that you need in order to fight against eczema.

There are various different nutrient groups that are widely believed to offer great benefits to anyone who suffers from eczema.

**The vitamin B complex:** While it was at one time believed that there was only one form of vitamin B, it is now known that instead of just one vitamin B, there are eight vitamins that together make up the vitamin B complex. While all of the different forms of vitamin B have their own health giving qualities, they also work together as a 'team' to promote different aspects of essential health.

All of the individual components of the vitamin B complex cooperate with one another to help the body function in many different ways.

Of particular interest to an eczema sufferer is the fact that the vitamin B complex is known to boost metabolic function and to promote skin and muscle tone. Vitamin B also helps to support both the immune and nervous systems, while also promoting cellular rejuvenation, growth and division.

In short, including the vitamin B complex in your diet will help your skin while also aiding your immune system to protect your body so it can fight back against skin conditions like eczema and psoriasis far more effectively.

There are many foodstuffs rich in the various vitamins that make up the vitamin B complex, such as bananas, lentils, potatoes, green vegetables and Tempeh.

You can also find vitamin B in many other foodstuffs such as eggs and dairy products, but as we discovered earlier in this report, these may be foodstuffs that make your eczema problem worse, rather than better.

The alternative is to use vitamin B supplements to increase the amount of this vital vitamin that you are taking in every day. Whether this is a sensible or viable alternative will to a large extent depend upon whether eating enough 'natural' vitamin B. sources is realistic, because if not, then supplementing your diet is probably going to be your best option.

**Zinc:** Zinc is a trace mineral that we all need in our diet because zinc possesses extremely powerful antioxidant qualities, which will help to prevent damage to or ageing of your skin.

Some foodstuffs that provide a reasonable level of zinc are things like lean roast beef, dates, roasted pumpkin and squash seeds.

The major problem with trying to consume enough zinc in your everyday diet is that most of the foods that are really rich in zinc are foods that you might be avoiding:

Zinc Rich Foods List	Milligrams	Portion
Oysters	25 +	100g
Shellfish	20	100g
Brewers Yeast	17	100g
Wheat Germ	17	100g
Wheat Bran	16	100g
All Bran cereal	6.8	100g
Pine Nuts	6.5	100g
Pecan Nuts	6.4	100g
Ok Sources of Zinc	Milligrams	Portion
Liver	6	100g
Cashew Nuts	5.7	100g
Parmesan Cheese	5.2	100g
Fish	3	100g
Eggs	2	100g

It may be necessary to find zinc supplements rather than trying to consume sufficient amounts of zinc in your normal daily food intake.

**Fish oil:** I mentioned earlier that fish oil is extremely important because it contains [omega-3 fatty acids](#), due to the widely accepted health benefits. However, fish oil is also a very rich source of vitamin A, which is essential for maintaining healthy skin while also providing anti-inflammatory benefits. Remembering that eczema is a condition of skin inflammation, including sufficient amounts of vitamin A in your diet or in your supplemental nutrition program is therefore essential.

**Grape or cherry juice:** Both of these juices possess antioxidant and anti-inflammatory qualities, so by doing nothing more complex than

drinking a glass of juice every day, you could give your body a significant boost in its fight against eczema.

## Fighting from the inside

There is evidence that eczema is a problem that is caused by an immune system that is not as strong or as robust as it should be. Consequently, using natural treatments and herbs to strengthen your immune system also helps to keep your eczema under control.

There are a multitude of different herbs that are capable of improving the performance of your immune system, making your ability to fight eczema from the inside more marked. By including these herbs in your diet or at least supplementing your diet with them, you increase the chances of dealing with your eczema in a wholly holistic way.

### Milk vetch

Milk vetch or [Astragalus membranaceus](#) is one of the most important plants in traditional Chinese medicine, one that has been used for at least 2000 years to strengthen the body.

As far as using Astragalus to combat eczema is concerned, the first thing to understand that it is that it is an [adaptogen](#), a substance that helps the body de-stress both physically and psychologically. Knowing that stress can often play an extremely important part in causing eczema attacks, this ability to reduce stress naturally is extremely important.

Many studies of the effects of the milk vetch have indicated that the plant offers 'non-specific' immune system benefits. This means that instead of activating the body's defence system against one particular form of 'invader' or infection, it enhances the overall strength of the immune system by increasing the number of [macrophages](#), the all-important white blood cells that give the immune system its strength and ability to resist attack.

Another significant benefit of Astragalus is that it possesses both tissue regenerating and anti-inflammatory qualities. It provides a great deal of assistance to an eczema sufferer because it reduces inflammation and also helps healthy new skin tissue to grow.

With extremely powerful antibacterial qualities as well, Astragalus is definitely a herbal remedy that you must include in your diet.

In China, it is common to boil a piece of Astragalus root in a broth with ginseng and other health giving plants, before discarding the root and serving. This is not only highly nutritious, it is also extremely delicious and an excellent way of including milk vetch in your diet.

## **St John's wort**

St John's wort or [Hypericum perforatum](#) is a plant that contains numerous compounds which have many well documented beneficial medical and psychological effects. While St John's wort is most widely known for its ability to act as an antidepressant that is every bit as powerful as pharmaceutical antidepressants like Prozac, it is also an herb that has significant benefits for anyone suffering from eczema as well.

The ability to counteract depression and affect mood is extremely relevant. If this herb has the ability to counteract depression, it makes it far less likely that you will suffer the kind of stress related problems that can make your eczema problem flare-up at any time.

Going beyond this and without delving into every individual active constituent of St John's wort, its most obvious benefit for an eczema sufferer is that it is a very powerful anti-viral and antibacterial agent, which significantly boosts the strength of your immune system.

It is also an herb that is highly effective for promoting rapid recovery from skin damage because of these qualities. For example, studies have indicated that applying St John's wort topically to burns can help the patient recover from their burn trauma up to three times more quickly than they would do using pharmaceutical applications.

## **Garlic**

The active ingredient in garlic that gives it its familiar pungent smell is a sulphur-rich volatile oil known as [allicin](#). It is this oil that gives garlic its ability to boost your immune system while also stimulating circulation and killing bacteria. In other words, garlic is another natural antibacterial substance that can help to improve the quality of your immune system, strengthening your body's ability to reduce the severity and frequency of eczema flare-ups.

However, in addition to being extremely effective as an antibacterial agent, garlic has many other qualities that further boost your immune system to fight back against any kind of infections or medical conditions such as eczema or psoriasis. For example, garlic has been shown to be antiparasitic, anti-viral, antiseptic and antifungal.

In short, including a healthy dose of garlic in your diet is going to give your immune system a significant boost, which would in turn help your body to fight against eczema.

The only downside of eating lots of garlic every day is that some people might find your breath a little unpleasant, which could be inconvenient at those times when you want to be at your best.

Consequently, many sufferers from a wide range of conditions including eczema choose to take garlic capsules rather than including garlic in their diet. There is nothing wrong with doing this, although it might have a bearing on your choice if you realize that including garlic itself in your diet is considerably cheaper than having to buy a constant stream of garlic capsules.

Nevertheless, no matter how include garlic in your daily 'diet', the main point is that you should do so as soon as possible.

### **Sage**

The full scientific name of the common sage which is most effective for dealing with skin conditions like eczema is [salvia officinalis](#). The fact that we commonly referred to topical skin applications that are most soothing and reviving as 'salves' should give you an indication of just how effective this particular herb can be for helping you deal with your eczema problem.

Sage is packed with powerful antioxidants, so it is highly effective in dealing with a condition like eczema. In addition, it has marked antibacterial qualities and is a known immune system stimulant.

One particular benefit of using sage both as a component of herbal-based eczema potions for topical use and including it in your diet is that both applied to the skin and taken internally, sage can reduce the severity of an eczema attack more quickly than almost any other herbal remedy, according to available research.

### **Honey**

Honey is a natural antibacterial substance that is often classified as one of the 'super foods' because of its abilities to boost your immune system and increase your natural vitality and energy levels.

Although most people would probably think of honey as something sweet that the bees make, you might be surprised to know that honey is in fact a very complex mix of antibacterial agents, organic acids and a wide array of necessary trace minerals like iron, copper, phosphorus, manganese and zinc.

I previously highlighted that zinc is an essential element to include in your diet if you want to fight off eczema entirely naturally, so including honey in your daily food intake could be a very smart move indeed.

In fact, honey demonstrates many other qualities which are especially appropriate to an eczema sufferer. For example, surgical wound infections and skin burns respond remarkably well to topical applications of pure honey. Indeed, there is some evidence that burns

in particular respond better or more quickly to honey than they do to pharmaceutical burn treatments.

Not only should you include honey in your diet, but it is also something that you can apply topically to eczema affected areas of the skin to bring instant relief and to help reduce the chances of scarring.

### **Shitake mushrooms**

Shitake mushrooms have been used as an integral part of ancient Chinese medicine for thousands of years, while in modern day Japan, they are used to help chemotherapy and radiation patients to recover more quickly.

This is because the medicinal benefits of Shitake mushrooms have the ability to penetrate deep into the bone marrow of anyone who eats them on a regular basis.

Of more interest to an eczema sufferer is the fact that one of the most important constituents of these mushrooms is a substance called [lentinan](#). This substance has been shown to have the ability to stimulate the growth of T-cells while also stimulating increased macrophage activity, improving the strength and numbers of white blood cells that lie at the heart of a strong immune system.

Both of these characteristics are therefore highly relevant for boosting the performance of your immune system, as it is the ability of lentinan to increase production of immune competent cells.

Including Shitake mushrooms in your daily diet will therefore give your immune system a great deal more strength to fight back against eczema attacks in the future, so they are definitely something that should be added to your weekly shopping list.

## **Other herbs for dealing with eczema**

Apart from the natural substances already listed in the chapter (all of which seem to provide major benefits for eczema sufferers), there are many other herbal remedies that have been reported by many sufferers to help offset the worst effects of eczema.

Most of these herbs should be applied to the eczema affected area of the skin, ideally after making a suitable oil compound with mild baby oil.

These herbs include burdock and licorice root, cleavers, nettles, yellow dock leaves and red clover.

In addition, lotions that are based on chamomile and/or primrose oil have brought relief to many sufferers, while we have already considered both tea tree and olive oil for application as a topical treatment for eczema because of the antibacterial and soothing qualities or both of these particular oils.

As suggested many times previously, there is no hard and fast rule about what will work for any individual eczema sufferer and what won't.

It is therefore a question of trying all of these solutions to see what works for you.



## Conclusion

There are many ways of dealing with eczema entirely naturally.

While the medical profession will almost always point you in the direction of pharmaceuticals such as corticosteroids and antihistamines, there really is no need to resort to potentially dangerous chemical drugs unless your eczema problem becomes so severe that natural solutions are no longer effective.

Fortunately, for the vast majority of sufferers, this possibility is never likely to become a reality. The majority of people who suffer from eczema will have to put up with intense itching from time to time, but luckily, for most people, eczema is never likely to become dangerous.

As suggested, there is no way that even the most widely recognized eczema experts can claim that they fully understand the condition.

As the condition itself is not fully understood by the most eminent researchers and medical professionals themselves, it is almost impossible to state what will be effective in any particular case.

On the other hand, you have seen that there are many alternatives that you can try in your efforts to tame your eczema problem entirely naturally. Consequently, if a natural solution that you try does not seem to work, it is simply a question of moving on to try the next alternative natural treatment.

In this book, I have attempted to collect together as many natural eczema treatments as I could find, because I am aware that some treatments will work far better for some individuals than others.

The bottom line is that you now have plenty of natural treatments for eczema options available. There is no reason why you should delay before starting to try them.