

Scratch Pad

2006 EXCERPTS

Dear Scratch Pad,

My son, Kevin, 7, has had eczema since birth and is especially troubled behind his knees. We have found something at the health food store that relieves our son's itch. It is acidophilus/probiotics. He started out at one pill a day, then went to three children's chewable per day. It eliminated the itch in a week or so, it still looks bad but at least it doesn't itch. As soon as we ran out of his favorite orange (Solaray Orange Dream) and he didn't take the strawberry, he was back to itching in a few days. Then I used a yeast cleansing product called Yeast Away with the pills, it took two bottles of this but he has been itch free for several months and doesn't need to take it anymore!

Our health food store owner is a herbologist and believes eczema is yeast which explains why acidophilus helps (I am sorry I can't give a technical explanation of bacteria/yeast etc. but I can give you his phone number if you contact me).

All I know is Kevin is itch-free on the acidophilus. Let me know how it works for you.

Anita Horning,
Lawrenceville, Georgia,

Dear Scratch Pad,

I have had eczema since I was a child. It went away, but has returned and recently has been very bad due to living in a house with forced air heating.

During the summer it gets better, and I've found a product that can be bought without prescription (less than \$10) that really helps to keep it under control; DERMAREST medicated lotion. The information in the package is very helpful. I use it only on areas where I can see or feel irritation, not as a regular lotion.

Sincerely,
Char Floyd

Dear Scratch Pad,

We would just like to express our gratitude for helping to sponsor us for the Eczema conference this past August in San Jose. We could not have gone otherwise and we are so glad we went!

The best part of the conference was simply to be around other people with the same condition as us (our whole family has it), Dad has the least (mainly as a kid) mom on her hands, our 3 year old has it all over, and baby is just starting to show signs at 4 months. So, we want to see a cure very soon!

By talking with others at the conference, attending the workshops and reading the literature, we learned a lot that we have been able to incorporate at home. We are treating the disease internally, externally, avoiding certain foods, and keeping our home environmentally cleaner - all of which has helped.

Thank you, NEA for helping to make our lives better!

Sincerely,
A Grateful Family

Dear Scratch Pad:

Hi, I keep forgetting that the Scratch Pad is for ME, too. I've spent all these years reading what all of you send in about your own journeys down this Ol' Eczema Road and never get around to telling my side of things. Well, I'm no genie, but the cork has just been removed from the bottle, so here goes and watch out.

For the past several years my facial eczema has been very difficult to manage. I can't seem to get it under control for more than a week or two at a time, no matter what I use. When it first flares I slap a mild-potency corticosteroid cream (usually Elocon) on it for a couple of days, then switch to using Elidel. Sometimes this works, sometimes not. At any rate, the itching is much worse on my face than on any other part of my body, and I am unable to keep my hands off of it. As a result, I currently have almost no eyebrows due to incessant rubbing, and you can all guess what color my skin is. The worst time for me is when I awake from even a short nap, let alone a full night's sleep (which I don't get very often because of the itching). It seems like being in a situation where I am unable to scratch or rub my skin for an hour or two makes the itch response build up to an unbearable level. Long car or plane trips are murder. I have noticed that getting in my car after an evening's event or after working all day, situations where I scrupulously avoid scratching my skin in public no matter how agonizing the need to scratch might be, leads to an itching frenzy that no amount of self-control can curb. Once I'm in my "safe zone" I will rip myself to shreds in minutes.

My private opinion about this frustrating problem is that somewhere it is written that Irene has to scratch X amount of hours per day or else. If I don't do it now, I'll have to catch up later. I know that's bosh, but it sure seems to make sense. If people with drug or alcohol addictions require constant replacement of their chemical of choice to avoid withdrawal symptoms, it stands to reason that my constant scratching, the need to do so, and the inability to control what I know is a damaging process, are just all the more reason to think I've got some sort of addiction problem going on. And yet more and more State-funded medical reimbursement and private insurance plans are telling us we've got a simple disease that is easily managed and will go away if we are good patients.

So what do I do now? March into my doctor's office and say, "Hey. I'm Addicted to Scratching. Got a 12-Step program for me?" Anyway, while I'm thumbing through cosmetic ads looking for eyebrow pencils that can last through somewhat vigorous rubbing (I draw the line on tattoos), I'd like to hear if anybody else wonders out loud about why we don't seem to get much advice on dealing with the psychiatric component of our "addiction", if in fact it is one. Not much use putting on medicine if we scratch it off as soon as it's laid down, although I've been told that mere exposure to a topical medication is enough in most cases. Don't quote me, I've just been told that by a couple of doctors.

I can't go away without handing out just one tip that does sometimes work for me, though, and it's nice and benign. Sometimes when my facial itching first starts up I will run to the freezer and grab a small plastic bag of liquid gel and just hold it against my skin. These things are sold over-the-counter in drugstores to soothe bug bites, sunburns, and post-cosmetic surgery symptoms as well as providing relief to athletic injuries requiring icing. Sometimes I will even just use a cold can of soda as an ice pack if I'm out and about. It doesn't feel as good as my gel pack, but it still works. Sometimes.

At any rate, it feels good to get that problem out in the air for discussion. Wish I'd done it sooner. Thanks for listening.

Irene Crosby
Portland, Oregon

Dear Scratch Pad,

I have been an eczema sufferer ever since I was two. I am only 25 so I have many more eczema years ahead of me. But I am in an upswing at the moment. First off, I stopped taking birth control. Within five months of starting a birth control regime I was 85% covered in eczema. My ears even stopped producing wax! Every pore in my body was dry. I went to several allergy specialists and dermatologists, but everyone said it couldn't be the birth control pills. After a little over a year of complete agony and severe depression, I went off the birth control pills regardless of what the doctors said. Within three months, my skin was back to its original eczema status (just patches on my arms, legs and neck). It was such a relief.

Now I just stick to a few things to help keep my normal eczema in check. Use a humidifier in the winter. Fill the humidifier with filtered water for the best outcome. Shower in filtered water. All the chemicals and chlorine in water can really irritate our skin. You can purchase a *Sprite* Slim-Line shower filter at Home Depot which screws directly onto your existing showerhead. It's very inexpensive and lasts about 4 months. I use a lot of Shea Butter products. I particularly love *Clinique's* Shea Body Butter. It is fragrance free and allergy tested. It can get expensive, but it's worth it. I used to have to apply lotion 2 times a day, but with this cream, I only have to do it once in the morning. *C&O Bigelow* (found @ B&B Works) makes a great face moisturizer with shea in it. *Oil of Olay* makes a good body wash with Shea Butter (and CVS has a Shea body wash knock-off that works just as well). I take a combination of Omega 3, 6, & 9 every other day. Eat a cup of yogurt every day! Bad bacteria are linked to eczema. If you don't like yogurt, you can buy acidophilus supplements at

GNC that has all the good bacteria to keep your body balanced. Use *All Free and Clear* detergent for your clothes and NO dryer sheets. Keep your nails cut to the nubs. Scratching with long nails heightens your risk of contracting a bacterial infection, particularly folliculitis (infection of the hair follicle). I have spent thousands of dollars trying different lotions, herbal supplements, steroids, prescription pills and other products and this is what I have found that works for me. I also have what is known as a skin fungus. You can contract it at public pools or from tanning beds. They are dry round patches. After you get out of a warm shower, the patches are red around the edges but white-ish in the center. This is not eczema, this is a fungus. This can be treated with a prescription or I have been using oregano oil topically to help kill it. Hope this helps someone. Scratch Pad has helped me in the past!

On the right track
Pittsburgh, PA

Dear Scratch Pad,

I am a 19 year old university student who has had eczema as well as asthma and other allergies. I have tried many types of medication: cortisones ranging in strength, coal tar, Chinese herbalist medicine, Elidel, oil caplets, diets etc. I have seen at least three dermatologists, doctors at Toronto Sick Kids Hospital, one Chinese herbalist, two allergy specialists and three physicians.

The most effective things for me were the cortisone/Elidel, changing my diet as well as keeping good skin hygiene. As a word of advice cortisone shouldn't be used in excess because it has discolored some of my skin and should be applied after washing to reduce bacteria. When I was around six my parents cut out milk, red meat, eggs, sugar, cocoa, wheat and white rice from my diet. This was slightly effective but I unfortunately couldn't stand this and I continue to eat these things in moderation. Sugar and additives particularly set off hives and oozing. For parents who find that their child is having an 'itch attack', I used to find that washing with soap would help to stop the oozing and calm the nerves. Hot water followed by ice water also numbs the nerves that trigger itching and kill bacteria in sores. Do not use petroleum jelly*. It may feel nice because eczema skin craves heat and it doesn't burn the sores now, but later you pay for it with more itching. I used to use Keri moisturizer but now I use Curel since it doesn't burn the sores and feels milder. Gold Bond powder "burns" the itch away if you can stand the pain. When I was younger my parents slept nearby and it was comforting than feeling alone for night itches.

Socially, I believe that this disease hindered my self esteem and confidence as a child. People treat you like a leper when they first see you. At my first job as a cashier in fast food, one lady told the manager she didn't want me to hand the meal wrapped in paper to her. She said I should be wearing rubber gloves to touch things and I was very close to breaking down in the middle of the restaurant as my manager suggested that I wear gloves at the cashier to "make the customers more comfortable". I had to quit playing the piano as my fingers were too pained to move quickly. When people first meet me in school or otherwise I can see they recoil a little. I used to get tiresome of explaining eczema and to avoid the stress I'd cover my hands and legs all the time. These kinds of stress lead to a cycle of social anxiety that can cause an increased need for scratching and if you know people with eczema, I think you should be aware of this.

Thanks for making this website

Michelle

*Editors Note: There is a disagreement on the use of petroleum jelly.

Dear Scratch Pad,

I first contacted NEA several years ago. I have had eczema since I was six weeks old, I am now 72 years old. What I used for the first 30 years was Mazon Medicated Cream and sometimes Mazon Medicated Soap. I did not need the soap all the time, but the cream worked very well for 30 years. These products were Non-prescription, and used to be manufactured in the United States. I have just found out these products are still available over the counter and are being manufactured in Canada. In the United States, they are available from eBay or the Vermont Country Store. I just ordered 2 jars from Canada. Mazon is especially good for maintenance. It rubs in easily like a vanishing cream, and it is not greasy. Also it does not come off on your clothing. Having eczema my whole life I really feel sorry for the people who are suffering so much, and know so little about living with eczema. I saw my Dermatologist recently, he also has eczema, and I showed him the ad for Mazon.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Kweit

Del Ray Beach, Florida

Dear NEA Scratch Pad

I have suffered with eczema for over 25 years. When my 8-1/2 year old son was just about a year old, I was told by his pediatrician when I pointed out some eczema that eczema was a disease of inconvenience, but not a painful problem. I rolled up my sleeves and showed him my suffering arms. No one can tell me this disease is not painful. My father, I, and now my two sons suffer from this problem. Let me share something I have recently learned outside of don't wear red/green clothes or use scented or colored soaps. I found out I am gluten intolerant. Since I have eaten pretty much gluten free, I have not had any problems. If I eat anything with gluten, I break out horribly. There is a definite connection. It would be a wise idea to check out what gluten intolerance is and see if there is a connection with your skin care. We live a healthier lifestyle with a lot less scratching.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Paris-Pugh

Ruther Glen, Virginia

Dear Scratch Pad,

I want to again offer information regarding my eczema. I have for this past year used Burt's Bee Hand Salve. The results are extremely wonderful. I had suffered with peeling, itching, bleeding hands that looked so ugly I was ashamed to shake hands or even be in public. This remarkable salve has almost completely cleared this problem to 99%. I would hope you would pass it on for others to try.

Thank you,
Ecorleybfly@aol.com

Dear Scratch Pad,

I would like to share some good news about my eczema problem. I have had eczema for about 35 years--and mostly on my hands. The skin condition on my hands has limited many an activity for me and really put a damper in my life. I have been to many dermatologists and all they do is give you another corticosteroid to try. After all these years of that, the skin on my hands is brittle and cracks at the drop of a hat. For the past four years I have tried to go totally steroid free on my skin. It's not been a pleasant time whatsoever. Between the itching, cracking and breakouts I have had to limit myself to such a non-normal lifestyle for me--basically not do anything that involves the hands.

For the last eight months I have been taking Nioxin Recharging Complex (an oral supplement). At first I began taking it to rejuvenate my fine, thin hair. Much to my surprise the skin on my hands has improved tremendously. I have been able to lead a semi-normal (for a person with eczema) lifestyle for the last five months! If you have never suffered from this, you have no idea what this has done for me. After going through what I've been through, this is better than winning the lottery! I am not using any of the medications from the dermatologists (all they do is give you a prescription and send you on your way). I have found something that is getting to the root of my problem and solving it.

Yes, I definitely will continue taking Nioxin. It has eliminated 90% or more of the horrendous itching and I've had no cracking whatsoever or oozing from scratching. In fact, I haven't even scratched for a few months.

My hair has never looked healthier - it's shiny, thicker or fuller looking and I even have new hair growth (lost some with pregnancy).

The only creams or moisturizers I use are Cetaphil (unscented) Emu Oil and Burt's Bees Beeswax and Banana Hand Cream. I will continue using these products. The rest of my skin is doing better also. Periodically I would break out in a rash on my arms or legs and I haven't had any of those either.

Please share this with other eczema sufferers.

Thank you!
Paula from Minnesota

Dear Scratch Pad,

Please tell other parents about a company called *Melaleuca The Wellness Company* (www.melaleuca.com). They produce four products that are proving to be a godsend for my 16-month old daughter suffering with eczema. These products include the following: a bar soap, known as Platinum; a kids' shampoo, called Koala Pals Tear-

Free Hair Wash; a laundry detergent, MelaPower; and a lotion for severely dry skin, Renew Intensive Skin Therapy.

I bathe her with the soap and wash her hair with the hair wash in luke warm water every 2-3 days. I do not immediately dry her with a towel. Rather, I apply the lotion to her whole body, except her diaper area, while she is still wet, so that the lotion can lock in the moisture. I towel-dry her diaper area, put her diaper on, and then allow the rest of her body to air dry before dressing. I apply the lotion every morning (after bath on bath days) and evening (before bed) without fail, and then again any time she scratches, which is less frequently all the time. I should add that Melaleuca makes a Koala Pals Tear-Free Body Wash for kids. I tried this product, but it seemed to irritate my child's skin.

I also use Melaleuca's laundry detergent, MelaPower. It comes in Scent-Free and Fresh Scent. I am delighted to report that the scented version does not bother my sensitive baby in the least! As such, I never bothered to try the scent-free. I wash the whole family's clothes and bedding in MelaPower. After making the switch, I noticed immediate improvement in my daughter's skin. She used to wake up in the middle of the night, itching, scratching, and crying for 2-3 hours. Now, she sleeps peacefully through the night.

My daughter also takes $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon of Zyrtec twice daily, and is on Rhinocort nasal spray, administered once daily. When a particularly persistent patch of eczema flares up, I have been instructed by her doctor to apply a thin coat of the prescription ointment, Topicort (.05%), twice daily to the affected area, just until it clears up. I credit the Melaleuca products for the fact that I have seldom had to use the prescribed ointment. My daughter has undergone allergy testing (the skin scratch test on her back) which has proved her to be allergic to a number of foods, including: nuts, potatoes, peas, soy, and egg whites. She is also lactose-intolerant. We try to avoid offending foods as much as possible.

My baby's condition has improved exponentially with the use of Melaleuca's hair wash, soap, lotion, and laundry detergent. But, she is not the only one to benefit from their use. My husband has suffered for years with mild eczema on his legs. He, too, has found relief from the itching and severe dryness. I have suffered all my life with severe perennial nasal allergies. My symptoms are much less severe now that I have been using the soap, laundry detergent, and other Melaleuca household cleaning supplies. You'll be happy to learn, as I was, that all Melaleuca products come with a 60-day money back guarantee.

My heart breaks for all the other babies out there suffering with this condition, and for all the mothers who may not be able to find effective, honest help in treating this condition. I wish I could share what I've learned with everyone dealing with eczema.

Thank you for your help,
Tracy Pena
Victoria, TX

Dear Scratch Pad:

I want to share a bit of information with you. My son was born with eczema and we have battled it almost nonstop for nine years. Like most parents I have read and researched eczema remedies, advice, et cetera. Recently we went to his dermatologist while my son was having a pretty bad flare-up. He told me to try a mixture from the pharmacy of Triamcin (0.1% solution) and Aquaphor. I had a good feeling about this from the get go, and sure enough, this worked wonderfully! I still cannot believe our instant luck after so many trials and tribulations. Our dermatologist told us that after the flare-up is under control we can use Crisco shortening. I thought I should share this information to hopefully help someone who is suffering as my son was. Now he is so excited that he doesn't itch constantly.

Christa Fields
Vincennes, Indiana

Dear Scratch Pad:

I was researching Atopic Dermatitis when I came across a project linking the role of the infectious bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*).

I just recently concluded that I have atopic dermatitis. At the age of twelve I started getting dry spots on my feet, but I dismissed them as ringworm. Each of the following years more and more symptoms surfaced—from severe allergies to blistering cracking fingers and burning dry skin. When I had a prick test performed on my back, I was allergic to everything but dust mites and mold. Three years ago I was placed in the hospital with an unknown disease. After three days spent near death, I was diagnosed with *Staph aureus*.

I am now 27 years old. My severe allergies, eczema, and depression have been very scary unknowns in my life. When I read this Web site for the first time, all my ailments were put in one basket. Before I thought I was cursed with a thousand different little diseases, but now I know I'm not alone.

Although no cure has been found, it is helpful to learn new ways to relieve the symptoms. I wondered how I got Staph and now I think the pieces are fitting together. All along I have hoped they all connected in some sort of overactive immune system. I would love to hear from new researchers solving this skin problem.

Thank You,
Joe Bohunis
Omaha, Nebraska

Dear Scratch Pad:

Those of us who have facial eczema often struggle to hide it, and that is no easy task. Have you ever found a liquid foundation makeup that initially covers your eczema nicely, but then promptly dries to a crisp, cracking surface that looks worse than the redness beneath it? I have!

I've been using Prescriptives foundations because the people at that company seem to understand how red we can get and have developed a nice range of colors to cover that redness. But once the foundation goes on, it promptly dries and starts flaking. Boo!

I really do wish that some of these companies would market makeup for women with eczema; it's a whole different ballgame from "normal" dry skin.

That said, I was talking to a woman who works for a small cosmetic company (Jan Marini) that has a line of very nice products that are sold through doctor's offices (they're quite expensive and are aimed more toward aging skin rather than very sensitive skin). I complained about the drying after-effect of most foundations and she suggested that I simply mix my foundation with a moisturizer that my skin could stand. After some experimentation, I found that if I mix my Prescriptives foundation (this is important: a dab at a time, not the whole bottle) with a little Cetaphil Moisturizing Cream — not lotion — it goes on smoother and doesn't get dry and flaky.

Something to try! Maybe this will work for you too. I'll let you know if it continues to work for me.

Irene Crosby
Portland, Oregon