

# Scratch Pad

## 2008 EXCERPTS

Dear Scratch Pad,

My 9 yr old son suffers from eczema. We have found thru Dr. Tamm of Strongsville that Desonide has helped to relieve my son's eczema. Currently the Desonide ointment has helped relieve his eczema and the scratching and bloody areas as well. It is the ONLY thing I have found in the 9 years of dealing with eczema that has worked at all.

Regards,  
Michelle Soltis

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Dear Scratch Pad,

Thank you for creating this fantastic essay (Images of Isolation). It is so encouraging to people like us who live with eczema everyday. I have it and seeing this is great for my sanity. It puts faces to stories and those stories I can relate to. It gives me strength. I personally do not know anyone else who has eczema so reading these stories is very validating to me.

Sincerely,  
Wendy Statters

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Dear Scratch Pad:

I am a 37-year-old female and have been living with eczema for roughly the last 32 years. I was diagnosed with eczema when I was 5, and re-diagnosed with it in my early 20s. I have been fortunate that I do not have eczema on my hands and that I respond well to hydrocortisone creams. My usual breakout areas are at the waistline of my pants and along the elastic of my underwear and bras. I used to break out along the sides of my knees, elbows, and wrists, and near my armpits. Over the years, I have found various things that decreased my symptoms. The combination of them has all but eliminated my eczema. My favorites are as follows:

1. Dove soap
2. Vaseline Intensive Rescue Moisture Locking Lotion (Advance Healing was better, probably because of the soybean oil, but they've taken it off the market). Before that, I used unscented Lubriderm.
3. Aloe Vera 100% Gel by Fruit of the Earth (It's clear, and is the only brand I trust. Some of the other brands make me break out.)
4. Evening primrose oil (which I began taking for endometriosis and it turned out to be great for my skin as well)
5. Humidifiers in the winter

I mix the aloe and the lotion and slather it over my skin from the neck down after every shower. That has dramatically cut down on my eczema. I still break out regularly, but the hydrocortisone controls that well. And I have quit breaking out along my wrists, elbows, knees, and armpits.

I take the evening primrose oil twice a day. And as long as I take it, about the only time I break out is during the winter. I have sporadic small breakouts all year long, but they are tiny and clear up quickly. I know it's time to get out the humidifiers when I suddenly start breaking out over a much larger area (over much of my torso and hips). The effects of both the aloe vera and the evening primrose oil were gradual, slowly improving my symptoms over several months. I know they both help with my eczema because any time I quit using either one for about a week, I begin having more breakouts.

It can be somewhat maddening that my skin is so dry from the neck down and so oily on my face and scalp. I joke that my oil glands are not evenly distributed. My scalp is so oily that I have dandruff; I have to shower daily to keep my dandruff under control. (On a side note, I know of four causes of dandruff: dry scalp, oily scalp, psoriasis on the scalp, or an allergic reaction to something in your shampoo.)

Aside from eczema, I also have severe nasal allergies (thank goodness for allergy shots!), "asthma-like symptoms," Inattentive ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and migraine-intensity chronic daily headaches (which are controlled by feverfew, an herbal supplement). I have heard that many of these conditions are often co-morbid (that is, they often occur together).

Bridgette O'Connell  
Central Arkansas

P.S. I recently discovered just how much of a difference the aloe vera gel makes in terms of my eczema. I usually shower daily; it's rare that I skip a day. Over one recent weekend, though, things were really hectic and I skipped a shower two days in a row. I took a shower that Friday morning and didn't take another one until the following Monday. On Sunday evening I noticed that I had some eczema patches on my sides and hips. Well, things had been so crazy I'd forgotten to refill the humidifiers the day before, so I refilled them. I also applied my over-the-counter 1-percent hydrocortisone cream, expecting the patches to improve by morning. To my surprise, the patches were even worse, despite the fact that I had applied the hydrocortisone cream pretty heavily. On Monday morning, I took a shower and applied my normal mix of aloe vera gel and lotion. On my eczema patches, I applied an additional coat of straight aloe vera gel and the hydrocortisone cream. Just five hours later, I was pleased to notice that the patches had cleared up considerably.

As a child, I was a military dependant, and as a young adult, I was in the U.S. Army (I did a 6-½ year stint straight out of high school). Throughout this period my prescription-strength creams for eczema were filled at the pharmacy on base at no charge. I did not start using an over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream until after I got out of the Army. I had been using aloe vera gel for several years by then. I had absolutely no way of knowing that my eczema would not respond to the over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream without the aloe vera gel. I can assure you that if I skip

a shower in the future, I will be sure to apply aloe vera gel to my problem areas, especially in the winter!

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Hi!

I have written a long letter to "The Scratch Pad" before, but this time I want to share something that has worked for me for a year now. My wonderful chiropractor/nutritionist, Dr. Maureen Moore of Yonkers, New York, suggested I take two acidophilus capsules (capsules containing a total of 540 milligrams of Lactobacillus acidophilus, distributed by DaVinci Laboratories of Vermont under the name Flora) every evening with dinner. Although it was gradual at first, the improvement in my skin has been dramatic. I knew that food sensitivities were contributing to my eczema, but now I believe they were the primary cause of it.

I hope this information helps anyone who sees a connection between food allergies and their eczema.

Dolores Gartner  
Bronx, NY

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Hello,

I am wondering if any Scratch Pad readers have a solution to hair dye sensitivity. I recently discovered I am allergic to hair dyes. My reaction after having my hair colored (to remove the grey) was quite severe, and I was told by my dermatologist that once an individual develops a sensitivity to hair coloring products, the allergy does not go away. Most likely the allergic reaction is connected to my eczema. I've searched the Internet for alternate solutions, but I haven't been successful as of yet. If any readers can offer any suggestions, I would be very appreciative. Thank you for your time.

Regards,  
Shoma Banerji

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Dear Scratch Pad:

I have found that a product called Bag Balm works well on flaking skin. This product does have a light odor, but I apply only a very thin layer, working it into the skin. And the softer areas do not itch.

Bag balm contains 3-percent 8-hydroxy quinoline sulfate in a petrolatum lanolin base (it contains no alcohol). A 10-ounce tin is approximately \$5 in most chain drug stores.

This product was originally made in 1899 and was first used on the udders of cattle for mild abrasions and to keep skin moist and soft. It now is a very popular item with potters, as clay draws moisture out of the skin.

I hope this information is of help to other persons with eczema. Keep up the good work!

Barbara Lubow  
Coram, NY

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Dear Scratchpad,

I read with interest the recent *Advocate* article on eczema and allergies and wanted to tell my personal story.

I have had asthma since age 2, with numerous allergic triggers. I did not have eczema as a child; rather, it developed suddenly in my 50s. It began with one spot and soon spread over my whole body. After more than one course of antibiotics and ever stronger cortisone creams, I contacted the NEA and began reading *The Advocate* and all the educational and research materials I could find. The "Scratchpad" letters helped me understand that the challenge was upon me to manage this disease, to look for remedies, and to try and find my individual cause.

I began to examine my life for possible triggers. One thing I suspected was chamomile tea, as I had been drinking a large amount of strongly brewed tea to treat a digestive ailment. I reluctantly eliminated the chamomile tea, and over the course of a month, about half of my eczema resolved.

Next I suspected the carpets. Extensive wall-to-wall carpet had been present in my apartment when I moved in a couple of years back. I armed myself with masks, gloves, and old clothes, plus common sense and information about carpet removal, and began removing a little at a time. There was a lot of deeply imbedded dust, and in several places there was significant mold under the carpet. I was careful to avoid spreading allergens around the house (no vacuuming) or undue exposure to myself. It took me nearly six months to remove all the carpet. I did not hire help as I wanted to control the process.

The rest of my eczema then started resolving. By the end of a year I was eczema-free, and I have remained so, with perhaps only a couple of minor outbreaks. I haven't had any outbreaks at all for several years now.

As the author of the *Advocate* piece said, of course allergies are part of the story, to a different extent for each person. Allergy tests do provide some guidance, but ultimately each person is their own best detective for triggers. It's certainly worth the search.

Sincerely yours,  
Lois Rosenthal  
Winthrop, MA

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Dear Scratchpad,

I love your publication and read it from cover to cover. The sharing by people who have “been there” is comforting and helpful.

Late in my life I developed severe AD after a prolonged period of intense stress. AD itself is a horrible stressful event as we all know. I was twice in the hospital, where I was rubbed from neck to ankle three times a day with triamcinolone and wrapped in wet sheets. I also used Premarin daily and cortisone creams in varying doses over about 10 years. I didn't like the side effects of the medication, so kept trying to get off it with little success. It was after the 10 or so years and many unsuccessful experiments with other medications that I was finally successful in freeing myself from AD and Premarin. That lasted for 7 years and then my AD returned again during a period of stress. I thought I had done enough self-help reading and refocusing to prevent its recurrence!

In the meantime I had developed some allergies I attribute to the prolonged steroid use. Regardless, I went back to Premarin again for a year and then worked for two years on tapering off of it.

One of the main things I have found for me—of course, I know everyone has individual sensitivities—is that it's important to avoid anything next to my skin made of latex or rubber of any sort. Also, I spend much time reading labels. Anything that has polyquaternium or quaternium of any sort is a trigger. Quaternium is a preservative and is in everything—eye drops, creams, soaps, shampoos, etcetera. I also wash any clothes I buy before I wear them, as most are processed with formaldehyde, which is related to quaternium.

I always make sure in a lab or a doctor's office to ask if their gloves are latex. More and more they are using other products. But it is good to ask.

Thank you for all the good work NEA does.

Aloha,  
Mary L. O'Brien  
Kaneohe, Hawaii