

# When the road gets bumpy:

## MANAGING THE BURDEN OF ECZEMA



Dr. Shawn Reynolds

Eczema Society of Canada asked registered psychologist and fellow eczema sufferer Dr. Shawn Reynolds to share his advice on coping with the stress and sometimes overwhelming feelings that accompany eczema symptoms.

### HOW DOES THE BURDEN OF ECZEMA IMPACT PATIENTS?

Living with eczema, can be very stressful, challenging, and burdensome. When people have stress from their eczema, they often seek help from their dermatologist or family doctor. The doctor can focus on medical strategies to treat the eczema. But often, there are other difficulties that go beyond the need for medical help.

Some of the emotional effects of eczema can include:

- Feeling self-conscious, or that others are always staring
- Feeling out of control, angry, and frustrated, especially with regards to itching and scratching
- Feeling socially withdrawn, anxious, or moody

Together, these challenges can leave people feeling stressed, anxious, and/or depressed. Working with a psychologist or mental health professional who understands these problems can help manage these feelings. There are resources in every province that can connect you with someone who can help, and your primary care provider can also help to find services in your area.

### DOES STRESS CAUSE ECZEMA FLARES?

There is a connection between stress and many medical conditions. It is important to be aware of this connection, and to take care of yourself when you are feeling extra stress. Stress can indeed flare eczema but living with a chronic condition is itself stressful! Activities like relaxation, exercise, talking to friends, and simply doing something fun or enjoyable, can all help to relieve stress.

### WHAT ARE SOME COMMON CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH LIVING WITH ECZEMA?

Adults and children with eczema often have experiences that can make them feel bad. These can include:

**Sleep problems:** When people wake up at night due to itching, it can be very frustrating. They often lose out on a good night's sleep. People who don't sleep well are often irritable the next day, at risk for headaches, and not as good at solving everyday problems. When children with eczema don't sleep, often no one in the house sleeps. This can impact the emotional well-being of the parents and siblings, as well as the child with eczema.

**Itch and pain management problems:** Eczema can be very itchy and can even be painful. This can be on the person's mind all the time. People in constant itch and pain have a hard time getting their daily activities and work done, as it is easy to be distracted by the pain. Sometimes they are more emotional because they get frustrated and tired from their disease.

**Self-confidence problems:** Sometimes people feel less self-control because of their eczema (like not being able to stop scratching). Some even feel less attractive because of changes in their skin.

### WHAT CAN WE DO TO IMPROVE THE ITCH OF ECZEMA?

It is very hard to avoid scratching when the urge comes, and this can make a person feel out of control. The good news is there are steps to help manage it. Treating the eczema appropriately to improve flares will reduce the itch. Cool packs or taking a cool shower, applying moisturizer when the skin is dry and itchy, and distraction may help. Preventative care like moisturizing daily can help to reduce itch too. As well, enjoying a fun activity, deep breathing, or a relaxation technique may also be helpful.

For people with eczema, it's common to hit rough patches in life – whether due to eczema or the outside world. There is hope and there is help. To learn more about how to manage eczema or to speak with a support volunteer who can relate to your experiences, visit [eczemahelp.ca](http://eczemahelp.ca).

Eczema Society of Canada thanks Dr. Reynolds for his volunteer contribution to this educational resource.

For additional support or information on managing eczema and mental health visit [www.eczemahelp.ca](http://www.eczemahelp.ca) or call 1-855-ECZEMA-1.

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