

DIET AND ECZEMA

SUCCESS REPORTED For patients with atopic dermatitis, commonly known as eczema, a healthy gut (and gut lining) may be related to a healthy skin barrier. Studies in eczema patients have supported the importance of a healthy gut microbiome.

One summary study looked at the results of experiments that tested synbiotics for the treatment of eczema.

Overall, the use of synbiotics (combinations of prebiotics and probiotics) for at least 8 weeks in adults and children over the age of 1 year old had a significant effect on eczema severity.

TRIGGERS The issue of food allergies in eczema is very complex. We know that patients with atopic dermatitis experience food allergies at a higher rate than others. In some cases, although not all, these food allergies may trigger a flare of atopic dermatitis.

A food diary may help identify some possible food allergies. Testing is then needed for confirmation. In children, we never recommend eliminating foods until testing is done, because of the risk of nutritional deficiencies.

Testing for food allergies is actually a very complex area: please see my website for more details on the limitations of food allergy testing.

There are at least 3 different types of food allergies (and possibly more) that can act to trigger flares of eczema, and each requires a different approach.

Some food allergies (known as IgE-mediated) result in reactions within minutes to hours. The top triggers are milk, eggs, wheat, soy, nuts, and seafood. Delayed eczematous reactions result in flares of eczema up to 2 days later, and the top trigger foods are the same. Systemic contact dermatitis can also result in a delayed flare of eczema. One of the top triggers is in persons allergic to fragrance additives in their skin care products. Related foods can trigger a rash, and these include cinnamon, tomatoes, citrus, and chocolate.

HELPERS In terms of foods that may help in the treatment of atopic dermatitis, the most promise has been seen with synbiotics. Synbiotics are probiotics in combination with prebiotics. Research studies have looked at the results of synbiotics when used in conjunction with standard eczema treatments.

In one summary paper, researchers found that the most promise in the treatment of atopic dermatitis was seen with probiotics that used multiple strains of bacteria, in combination with prebiotics, when given for at least 8 weeks to adults and children over the age of 1. There's much more research necessary, though, before we can be sure of what to recommend. We still don't know what types of probiotics would be best, especially in terms of bacterial strains, dosage, and formulation.

We can certainly recommend eating for a healthy gut with the use of prebiotic and probiotic foods.

Maintaining a healthy gut ensures the growth of good microbes. These microbes are able to produce short chain fatty acids. SCFAs are substances that may help strengthen the skin barrier. Some power fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids, have also shown promise in reducing skin irritation and moisture loss.

Vitamin D has been studied for its possible role in the treatment of eczema, but more research is needed. Preliminary research suggests that it may be helpful in those with very low levels of vitamin D, those who have food allergies, and those who experience frequent bacterial skin infections.