ATOPIC DERMATITIS AFFECTS ALL AGES
Eczema treatment can have a powerful impact on patients’ quality of life

NEW YORK (July 27, 2017) — Eczema is not just kids’ stuff. Although the skin disease is commonly diagnosed in infancy and early childhood, it also can affect adults — sometimes more profoundly than younger patients.

“Adult eczema patients may have dealt with their symptoms for their entire lives, which can be draining, or they may experience symptoms for the first time as adults, which can be a difficult adjustment,” says board-certified dermatologist Jonathan I. Silverberg, MD, PhD, MPH, FAAD, an assistant professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and director of the Northwestern Medicine Multidisciplinary Eczema Center in Chicago. “Either way, this condition can take a real toll on them.”

Also known as atopic dermatitis, eczema is characterized by dry, red patches of skin accompanied by intense itchiness. According to current estimates, this disease affects about half as many adults as it does children, Dr. Silverberg says, but prevalence among adults may be increasing, reflecting a recent increase in overall eczema prevalence.

Although some may mistakenly view the condition as a childhood disease and not a serious health problem for older patients, Dr. Silverberg says, eczema can have a significant impact on adults’ quality of life. “People who aren’t familiar with the disease might say ‘It’s just eczema,’” Dr. Silverberg says. “But for many patients, it’s not ‘just eczema.’ It can be debilitating.”

According to Dr. Silverberg, atopic dermatitis can make everyday tasks and routine physical activities difficult, affect work attendance and performance, disrupt sleep, and contribute to mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Additionally, patients with eczema in visible locations may struggle in social situations, he says, particularly if they face stigma from other people who incorrectly believe the disease is contagious or associated with poor hygiene. “Fortunately for atopic dermatitis patients, treatment can help alleviate the negative effects of this disease and improve their physical and mental well-being,” he says.

In addition to identifying and managing the factors that trigger flares and exacerbate the condition, atopic dermatitis treatment regimens may include moisturizers, topical steroids or calcineurin inhibitors, phototherapy, or systemic medications. Within the last year, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved two new treatment options for atopic dermatitis — an anti-inflammatory topical medication for mild to moderate disease and an injectable systemic drug for moderate to severe disease — and there are additional treatments in the development pipeline, Dr. Silverberg says.

“This is an exciting time that offers a lot of hope and promise for people with eczema, both children and adults,” he says. “If you’re struggling with this disease, there are treatment options out there for you, and a board-certified dermatologist can help you find the eczema management plan that works best for you and improve your quality of life.”

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