

Eczema Roundup: Vitamin D, Fish Oils, Pet Birds and Thermal Spas Help, Probiotics May Not

Foods Matter, November 2008 - Vitamin D - Researchers at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine have been investigating a peptide called cathelicidin, which is protective against bacteria such as staphylococcus aureus which often infects eczematous skin. It has been shown that defects in the immune system of those with eczema interfere with the skin's ability to produce this peptide and in many skin diseases, including eczema, a deficiency of cathelicidin correlates with increased infection. The study, led by Professor Richard Gallo at the UCSD School of Medicine, found that use of oral vitamin D dramatically increases cathelicidin production in the skin of patients with atopic dermatitis ...

However, the researchers caution that this was a small study and that further research is needed to evaluate the long-term effects of vitamin D supplementation. -- Journal of Allergy & Clinical Immunology, October 3rd 2008

Fish Oils and Birds - Pediatrician Bernt Alm of the University of Gothenburg and colleagues used the ongoing Infants of Western Sweden study, following babies born in 2003, to question the parents of 4,921 infants at six months and 12 months after birth on family history, environment, perinatal history, tobacco, breastfeeding, food introduction and diseases. Nearly 14% of these infants had eczema at six months and 21% had the condition at a year. Another 5% had been diagnosed with a food allergy -- most commonly to cow's milk.

The link with family history was consistent with previous findings that 82% of a person's susceptibility to eczema was genetic. However, early introduction of fish into the diet and having a bird in the home were both associated with a decreased risk. Some studies suggest that contact with feathers might prevent atopic disease, while the fact that birds are usually kept inside at all times, may expose infants to endotoxin which protects against eczema.

The high levels of omega-3 fatty acids in some types of fish might partly explain the association between decreased risk and fish eating, although, because no relationships with specific types of fish and eczema were found, the researchers could not ascribe the effect to omega-3 fatty acids alone. -- Archives of Disease in Childhood.

Thermal Spas Vindicated - Dermatologists at Eberhard Karls University Tübingen in Germany have been studying the effect on eczema of vitreoscilla filiformis, a type of harmless bacteria found in the water of sulphurous thermal springs. Not surprisingly, to the thousands of people who regularly visit thermal spas for skin problems (see <http://tinyurl.com/45e2rh> on the Foods Matter website), they found that in the group using the vitreoscilla filiformis, clinical symptoms and itching were reduced significantly in as little as two weeks in comparison with the control group.

They also noted that the infection-carrying bacteria found on the skins of a quarter of the patients in the trial was reduced by between 15 and 30%. As improvements were found in skin that was not colonised with harmful bacteria the researchers believe that V filiformis is not purely antimicrobial but contains compounds that regulate the immune system and could have the potential for new topical treatments for eczema.

Probiotics - A Cochrane Collaboration review, carried out by Dr Robert Boyle of Imperial College London, of 12 studies involving 781 children, concluded that there is no evidence that probiotics in supplement form reduce the symptoms of eczema or change its severity. The 12 studies were conducted between 2003 and 2008 and the children ranged in age from a month to 13 years old, but most of them were under 18 months old and appeared to have an allergy to cow's milk.

However, Dr Boyle did suggest that new probiotics, yet to be studied, might have an effect and there is evidence emerging that probiotics may be useful for preventing eczema when taken during pregnancy or in the first weeks of life.

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Antifungals for Dandruff - Seborrheic dermatitis, the medical name for what most people know as dandruff, often responds to anti-fungal treatments. This suggests that it may be caused by an overgrowth of the yeast, Pityrosporum ovale and can therefore often be successfully treated with foods with anti fungal properties such as olive oil, coconut oil, turmeric, ginger, sage, oregano, radishes and fermented foods, both rubbed into the affected parts and eaten. This story was reprinted with permissions from Foods Matter (November 2008 issue), the magazine for food allergies and intolerances.