

NEWS • CORONAVIRUS NEWS

Why Your Eczema May Be Worse During the Pandemic

By [Amanda Krupa, MSc](#) | Updated on January 28, 2021

Fact checked by [Marley Hall](#)



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Key Takeaways

- Many eczema sufferers have been experiencing worsening symptoms or seeing dormant eczema return since the pandemic began.
- SECURE-AD is a web-based registry designed to help improve the medical care for people with eczema who are infected with COVID-19.
- Telemedicine makes it easier to get care and treatment recommendations from a dermatologist.

For 29-year-old Mindi Sachs, job insecurity within the food and hospitality industry has exacerbated her normally controllable eczema. “When I was younger, my eczema flare ups would usually be in the crevices inside my elbow, on my chin, and around my mouth,” says the Brooklyn, New York resident and founder of the communications agency, [The Rite Bite](#). “But in the last five months, painful flare ups started appearing on my hands and fingers.”

Nationwide, dermatologists are seeing a lot of eczema on people’s hands — an indirect response to COVID-19. Esther E. Freeman, PhD, MD, director of global dermatology at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, and a member of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) COVID-19 Task Force, tells Verywell this is because people are washing their hands more. “It’s not a result of the virus, but the environment we are all living in.”

While Sachs is far from the only person seeing her pandemic-related stress manifest on her skin, she was proactive about finding treatment via telemedicine. “My sister-in-law is a physician’s assistant for a dermatologist in Michigan, and even though we are states away, I was able to get a video appointment and a new prescription sent to my local pharmacy,” she says.

Related: [An Overview of Hand Eczema](#)

Increased Stress Is Triggering Eczema Flares Too

There’s no denying it: Stress is the root of many of our health problems, and eczema is no exception. “When we are stressed, our body releases a hormone called cortisol,” Sklyer Stein, president of the skincare brand [Gladskin USA](#), tells Verywell. “When we are under long periods of stress — like we are now during the pandemic — we release an excessive amount of cortisol that can cause too much inflammation in the body.”

The result, he says, often triggers an itchy and uncomfortable eczema flare up.

One study also suggests stress makes it harder for the skin to recover from irritation and skin damage, making eczema outbreaks last longer in a seemingly endless stressful cycle.^[1]

“The anxiety that comes along with the uncertainty of the pandemic has created a stressful mental environment for many people. Stress and worry can cause someone with eczema to have a reaction either inside or outside the body,” says Chelsea Lewis, founder of [My Mommy Wisdom](#), a

Black-owned baby goods company. My Mommy Wisdom makes an eczema relief moisturizer designed specifically for Black women and children, who tend to have more severe eczema because it is harder to detect on darker pigmented skin.

Related: [Study Shows Who Is Likely To Experience More Stress During COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Right now, Lewis suspects many eczema sufferers are in that situation: stressing about how their life and finances will be impacted by COVID-19 and seeing their body flaring up because of the stress.

According to a 2018 meta-analysis, children with severe eczema were also more likely to be depressed and anxious – up to 27% more than their peers without the condition.^[2] Throw in a pandemic, and it only increases kids' feelings of social isolation because of how they look.

If You've Had COVID-19 and Eczema, You Can Participate in Research

A ground-breaking global research initiative called SECURE-AD (Surveillance Epidemiology of Coronavirus Under Research Exclusion – Atopic Dermatitis) is underway. Freeman says the web-based registry is designed to help improve the medical care for people with eczema who become infected with COVID-19.

“Filling in the [SECURE-AD Patient survey](#) only takes about five minutes and asks you questions about yourself, your eczema treatment, other conditions/medications and how the COVID-19 infection affected you,” she says. “It’s typically hard for patients to characterize their own (or their child’s) rash using words, so we also have a [SECURE-AD physician registry](#).”

Treating Eczema Flares

For many people, eczema is well-controlled with over-the-counter treatments such as moisturizers and topical corticosteroid ointments. In fact, research suggests any kind of moisturizer minimizes flareups and reduces the need for prescription medications.^[3]

With so many different eczema products on the market, Freeman says it’s important to distinguish between lotions, creams, and ointments. “The best results come from ointments, because they have the highest percentage of oil,” she says. The only caveat, she adds, is that some people have trouble with ointments in the daytime. “They can be sticky and leave you or your child feeling greasy, so slather your hands with Vaseline or Aquaphor at night and cover them with socks and gloves before bed.”

Related: [6 Skincare Products Ideal for Winter Eczema](#)

Stein said Gladskin, which is sold exclusively online and included in the National Eczema Association (NEA) directory of over-the-counter [products designed for people with eczema](#), has seen a 50% increase in sales of its [Eczema Cream with Microbalance](#) during the pandemic.

Everyone’s eczema is different, and not everything works the same way on everyone. So, if your over-the-counter products aren’t doing the trick, talk with your doctor about something stronger, such as:

- [topical steroids](#)
- [ultraviolet therapy](#)
- wet dressings
- [antifungals and antibiotics](#)

Health Equity in Eczema Treatments

Just because different treatment options exist doesn’t mean people are going to pursue them. According to a 2015 study published in *JAMA Dermatology*, cost was a major treatment barrier among the over 60,000 study subjects:^[4]

- 17.6% delayed care due to concerns about cost
- 13.1% did not seek care due to concerns about cost
- 15.7% report an inability to cover the cost of prescriptions

Furthering the divide is a new injectable biologic medication called Dupixent. It was [approved in 2017](#) by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat some 300,000 people suffering from severe eczema who haven’t responded to other treatments. The high cost of the drug—a whopping \$37,000 per year—is out of reach for most, and is the subject of continued advocacy efforts between drug makers and insurance companies, according to [The New York Times](#).

Related: [Health Disparities: What They Are and Why They Matter](#)

When To Talk With Your Dermatologist

If you are having trouble figuring out whether your eczema flare ups are caused by stress or something else, make a call to your dermatologist for help and guidance.

Thanks to telemedicine, you can avoid a trip to the doctor’s office or hospital and simply take photographs of the areas of concern for discussion during your video visit.

Your dermatologist can also give you ideas for coping with stress in healthy ways such as moderate exercise, support groups, breathing exercises, and therapy.

What This Means For You

Understanding the cause of your stress and how it's related to your eczema can help you learn how to manage it and prevent future flareups.

The information in this article is current as of the date listed, which means newer information may be available when you read this. For the most recent updates on COVID-19, visit our [coronavirus news page](#).

4 Sources

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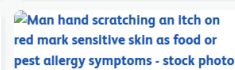
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