

Eczema

in children

Sara Eames describes how she treats this relatively common problem

In the children's clinic at the Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital, eczema is one of the most frequent reasons for referral. It varies in severity from a few small patches to a severe skin condition which can cover most of the body.

It appears to be an increasingly common condition and the allopathic treatments available are palliative rather than curative, and may be associated with long-term side effects. Severe eczema in a child can have a massive effect on the whole family. Complicated creaming and bandaging regimes are very time-consuming and children are often irritable and eat poorly as they feel so uncomfortable. Severe itching can interrupt sleep for everybody and children can feel stigmatised at school if their rash is visible. For all these reasons people often seek homeopathic help for their children.

History taking is a vital part of the art of homeopathy and, as there are many possible causative factors in a case of eczema, which can effect the choice of a homeopathic remedy, it is essential to collect as much information as possible.

Eczema is often linked



Photo: National Eczema Society

Children with eczema are often irritable as they feel so uncomfortable and severe itching can interrupt sleep for all the family

with other allergic conditions so I like to find out as much as possible about any other medical problems in the child or his family and I also go into as much detail as possible about the pregnancy, birth and early life of the child.

The choice of homeopathic treatment is a wide one as there are many remedies, which affect the skin, and a variety of treatment models which can be used. One of the most successful ways is to prescribe the constitutional remedy for the child, that is the remedy that fits the overall person, not just the local skin symptoms. Examples of remedies commonly used in this way

include many well known homeopathic treatments such as Sulphur, Calc carb and Arsenicum album.

There is often a strong family history of allergic conditions, or other diseases in a case of eczema. When Hahnemann was developing his principles of homeopathy he noted the strong predisposition to various disease types in different families and postulated an inherited explanation for this in his theory of miasms. This approach is still extremely relevant today and in the treatment of eczema it is often essential to consider this miasmatic approach and prescribe a relevant nosode. I

find it very useful either when there is a clear family history of certain diseases or when a constitutional remedy seems to suit a child very well but does not produce a complete cure.

There are many other treatment models which are useful for eczema. I find very commonly that parents have often already made some link between an event in their child's life and the onset or worsening of their eczema. These can be a variety of things such as separation from a parent or carer, the birth of a new baby in the family, the introduction of new foods into the diet, a seemingly unrelated illness or vaccinations. The beauty of homeopathy is that there are remedies which are known to be useful in these situations and I find that when there is a clear aetiological link with the symptoms, homeopathic treatment is particularly successful.

Thus Nat mur can be useful after a child has been separated from his mother, or a remedy made from the chickenpox virus can help if a child has never been well since having had that illness. If a baby's eczema has worsened soon after a specific vaccination then he can be treated with a general remedy to help after vaccinations, such as Thuja, or with a specific remedy made from the vaccination itself.

Local treatments

As well as using a mixture of these overall approaches, eczema can be such a distressing condition that it can be really helpful to use local treatments as well. These can be in the form of homeopathic remedies based on the local symptoms. Examples of these would be Sulphur for a red, burning,

itchy rash, worse for heat and water or Graphites for a crusty, cracking eczema which oozes sticky, honey coloured fluid. Local treatments can also be applied topically in the form of creams, ointments and tinctures. I find Calendula and Urtica urens a particularly helpful mixture.

Lifestyle changes

In combination with a homeopathic approach it is nearly always necessary to give nutritional and lifestyle advice. All children will benefit from a healthy diet based on fresh, additive-free foods. In addition, some children have severe allergic reactions to specific foods which need to be avoided in the short term and which can often be reduced by a combination of overall homeopathic treatment, improved nutrition and desensitisation, in the longer term.

Some additives in food can exacerbate a child's eczema

Photo courtesy of Keith Richards



Case histories

Two children whom I have recently seen at the RLHH illustrate the combination of various homeopathic strategies in the treatment of eczema.

Steven age three was covered in eczema when I first met him. He had a very dry scaly skin, which bled profusely when he scratched it. He slept poorly at night due to the itching and always wanted to be in his parents' bed, so none of the family was getting proper sleep. He had been treated extensively by his GP and local hospitals, mainly with steroid creams and repeated courses of antibiotics when the skin looked infected. He also had a tendency to get recurrent coughs and colds. In spite of all this he was an extremely lively, sociable boy who was popular at nursery, sensitive to others' feelings and loved to be the centre of attention.

He seemed a fairly typical Phosphorus child and a course of Phosphorus improved both his skin and his tendency to catch colds by about 50 per cent. When the dose was repeated and the strength increased, however, there was not much further improvement. His mother was applying Graphites ointment locally and was able to give up the steroid creams completely, but I still felt we could improve things further.

He had a history of one grandparent having suffered from TB and his mother remembered that his cradle cap had worsened as a baby after his BCG vaccination. On the basis of this I prescribed Bacillinum, a mixed tubercular nosode, and the improvement continued. His skin is now virtually free

of eczema and his resistance to colds much better.

Jana, a six year-old twin girl, was behaving badly at home as well as suffering from eczema. She had skin problems virtually all her life and was in hospital at the age of one for this. All of the family had been traumatised by this event as Jana was petrified by the whole experience. The parents could still remember and visualise the fear on her face and vowed never to let her go into hospital again. Since that time her skin and behaviour had deteriorated. At home she was dictatorial, always wanted her own way and fought constantly with her twin, while at school she was well behaved even though her skin was itching a lot in the warm classroom.

Based on her overall behaviour, the skin symptoms and the fact that she had been worse since a severe fright I prescribed her *Lycopodium*, which has been a tremendous help both to her and her family! Her behaviour at home started to improve within a few days of the first dose and her skin is now gradually improving too. She has also been able to stop her steroid creams and now uses *Calendula* and *Urtica* cream which suits her well.

Eczema may at first glance seem a superficial condition but as can be seen it is often connected with a more complicated history. In my experience parents can be very good at deciding when to repeat a dose of a remedy or in the selection of a local remedy, but I would always advise a full homeopathic consultation with a well qualified practitioner to help with the treatment for the eczema.

New research trial to study homeopathy in atopic eczema

Sara Eames' article illustrates how well homeopathy can treat individuals with eczema. Her experience mirrors what many of her medical colleagues in the Faculty of Homeopathy report. Despite such compelling anecdotal evidence, the surprising fact is that no clinical research project has ever been carried out in this area. Positive findings from such research would make an enormous contribution to the evidence base for homeopathy, and would support the argument to include homeopathy within NHS care for this condition.

The BHA's Research Committee has recognised the opportunity to explore this point, and has set out jointly with the Faculty of Homeopathy to undertake a major clinical trial. We will focus on the condition known as atopic eczema (also called atopic dermatitis). This is the most common chronic inflammatory skin disease among children in developed countries, and affects 15 per cent of UK school children.

We have identified over 30 Faculty doctors who wish to take part in the project. In the first instance, we need to conduct a 12-month pilot study to test out things like patient recruitment and the suitability of the clinical outcome measures we choose. With the information we obtain, we would then

proceed with a full, randomised clinical trial, lasting probably three years.

A key feature of the research we propose is that practitioners taking part in the trial will not change their normal homeopathic practice of medical care. Sara's article reminds us how crucial it is to retain an individualised approach to each patient.

There is another important feature of the investigation: we will be working in close collaboration with Professor Hywel Williams, Professor of Dermatology at the University of Nottingham. Professor Williams is internationally recognised for his research in eczema, and he will give important advice on all the dermatological aspects of the work. The collaboration also bestows a wider respectability on our research efforts.

We are working to secure substantial research funding for both the pilot study and the full trial, so if you personally would like to support our research, we would be delighted to receive your contribution.

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