

## SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH ATOPIC DERMATITIS: A HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL CONSULTATION GUIDE

This consultation guide is intended to support healthcare professionals to have productive conversations with patients and ask the relevant questions to provide optimal management of atopic dermatitis (AD), also known as atopic eczema.

AD is a chronic, inflammatory autoimmune disease that affects not only a person’s physical health, but also often impacts their mental health, wellbeing and general quality of life.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore important to assess and manage a person with AD holistically. This should include an assessment of detailed clinical and treatment histories, identification of potential trigger factors, the psychological impact of their disease, and its effect on their social life, education, employment and personal relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst many people with AD can be cared for in primary care, for those who have severe or persistent symptoms, referral to a specialist may be necessary.<sup>2</sup> This checklist will help you assess whether a patient’s condition is being optimally managed, or whether they could benefit from a referral to a dermatologist.

### 1. ASSESS HOW ATOPIC DERMATITIS IS AFFECTING THE PERSON’S LIFE

Use the below questions to assess how AD has affected the person’s life in recent weeks. Consider repeating this exercise at each appointment with this person, whilst encouraging the patient to record their experience using the form available [here](#). This will help build a complete picture of how AD is affecting the person and whether any changes need to be made to their care and/or treatment.

					
How would you rate your eczema-related symptoms?	None	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Very severe
How many days did you have intense episodes of itching because of your eczema?	None at all	1-2 days	3-4 days	5-6 days	Every day
How bothered have you been by your eczema?	None at all	A little	Moderately	Very	Extremely
How many nights did you have trouble falling or staying asleep because of your eczema?	No nights	1-2 nights	3-4 nights	5-6 nights	Every night
How much did your eczema affect your daily activities?	None at all	A little	Moderately	Very	Extremely
How much did your eczema affect your mood or emotions?	None at all	A little	Moderately	Very	Extremely

**Note: Undertake an assessment to identify any psychosocial co-morbidities the patient might be experiencing. To identify particularly vulnerable patients, a simple scoring tool such as the [Dermatology Life Quality Index](#) may prove useful.<sup>3</sup>**

**2. DISCUSS HOW THE PERSON COULD MANAGE THEIR ATOPIC DERMATITIS ON A DAILY BASIS**

Step 1: If treatment has already been initiated, you should review the patient’s compliance with the treatment regime prescribed. Ask the patient if they feel the treatment is effectively managing their condition, if they are suffering from any side-effects, and if they are managing to take the treatment.

Step 2: To assist with the day-to-day management of this chronic condition, it is helpful for patients to understand their role in managing their condition and to co-create a treatment plan. The below chart provides a template to support you to co-create a personalised plan with the patient. When discussing your recommendations, it is important to provide the patient with all relevant information to support them in making a shared decision on the best course of action.

Step 3. Patient education is a key part of managing AD to equip so patients are able to self-manage their condition. Giving instructions on emollient quantity, frequency and application will help with compliance. Written treatment plans help to reinforce this information, providing reviews on treatments and medications where AD remains persistent and problematic.

	My recommendation	Patient’s next step
Managing eczema-related symptoms <i>Dryness, redness, cracked skin, etc.</i> <sup>4</sup>		
Treating eczema flares <i>Trigger avoidance</i>		
Falling or staying asleep		
Planning daily activities		
Managing how eczema affects their mood or emotions		

### 3. DISCUSS HOW THE PATIENT CAN HELP STAY IN CONTROL OF THEIR CONDITION

Below are five questions that you could ask patients to consider ahead of future appointments. The answers will help you to assess how well they are managing their AD and may assist you in determining the best course of treatment for them at their next visit.

- Is there anything you would like to include into your daily routine to better manage your condition?
- Have you noticed any changes in your symptoms or mood?
- Are you encountering any challenges with the current treatment plan?
- Have you noticed anything that tends to trigger your flare-ups?
- What parts of the current treatment plan are working well for you?

### END OF CONSULTATION

At the end of each consultation, you should make sure that the patient has information and contact details for the relevant patient support groups (see appendix). This will enable them to access the necessary support and information on their disease, as well as the wider impact on their psychological and mental health, education, employment and personal relationships.

If it is clear that a patient's condition is not improving, despite using a variety of treatment options, you should consider whether the patient would benefit from a referral to a dermatologist. This should be discussed with the patient at this stage. This option could also be considered at an earlier stage, where the condition is very severe.<sup>2</sup>

## APPENDIX I: PATIENT SUPPORT GROUPS

### Allergy UK<sup>5</sup>

Allergy UK is the leading national charity providing support, advice and a wide range of information for those living with allergies, including eczema and dermatitis factsheets and an eczema news update service.

Website: [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

### National Eczema Society<sup>6</sup>

The National Eczema Society (NES) is a charity dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with eczema and their carers. As part of this work, NES runs a network of regional eczema support groups.

Website: [www.eczema.org](http://www.eczema.org)

### Eczema Outreach Support<sup>7</sup>

Eczema Outreach Support (EOS) offer support services for families of children affected by eczema in the UK. Examples of the support they can provide include 1-1 help, emotional support, family events, children and teen virtual clubs and eczema sessions with health visitors.

Website: [www.eos.org.uk](http://www.eos.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Allergy UK and Sanofi Genzyme, *Seeing Red: Getting Under the Skin of Adult Severe Eczema* (2017). Available at:

[www.allergyuk.org/assets/000/001/411/Seeing\\_Red\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_25.04.17\\_original.pdf?1508228476](http://www.allergyuk.org/assets/000/001/411/Seeing_Red_Report_FINAL_25.04.17_original.pdf?1508228476) [Accessed: February 2019]

<sup>2</sup> National Eczema Society, 'Eczema and its management: a guide for Healthcare Professionals' (2018). Available at: [www.eczema.org/factsheets---healthcare-professional-guides](http://www.eczema.org/factsheets---healthcare-professional-guides) [Accessed: February 2019]

<sup>3</sup> Finlay AY and Khan GK. Dermatology Life Quality Index (DLQI): a simple practical measure for routine clinical use. *Clin Exp Dermatol* 1994; 19:210-216. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2230.1994.tb01167.x> [Accessed: February 2019]

<sup>4</sup> NHS Choices, Atopic Eczema: Overview (2016). Available at: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/atopic-eczema/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/atopic-eczema/) [Accessed: February 2019]

<sup>5</sup> Allergy UK, Helpline. Available at: [www.allergyuk.org/get-help/helpline](http://www.allergyuk.org/get-help/helpline) [Accessed: February 2019]

<sup>6</sup> National Eczema Society, Helpline. Available at: [www.eczema.org/helpline](http://www.eczema.org/helpline) [Accessed: February 2019]

<sup>7</sup> Eczema Outreach Support, Contact. Available at: [www.eos.org.uk/contact](http://www.eos.org.uk/contact) [Accessed: February 2019]