The mental health impact of living with atopic eczema

Allergy UK Helpline 01322 619898
www.allergyuk.org
Can having atopic eczema affect my mental health and general well-being?

Atopic eczema is often seen as ‘just a skin condition’, but when you are living with eczema it can impact on all aspects of your daily life, affecting your physical, social health and general well-being, as well as your mental health.

Atopic eczema (also known as atopic dermatitis) is a very common, chronic, dry, itchy, skin condition

In the UK eczema affects...

1 in 5 children

1 in 10 adults

A 2017 report conducted by Allergy UK found that in people with atopic eczema...

82% felt their mood was affected with...

70% having felt depressed because of their eczema

86% reported that eczema impacts their day to day activities

73% felt their social life was affected

70% reported their sleep was affected

56% felt their personal relationships were affected

Atopic eczema can cause intense emotions...

...stress anxiety anger depression social isolation low self-esteem embarrassment shame desperation

(APPGS 2013)
The impact of atopic eczema

Atopic eczema can have a significant impact on all areas of your life, not just the physical skin symptoms including itch, but it can also affect relationships, self-esteem, confidence, work or school and carer choices.

**Itch**

One of the main physical symptoms associated with allergic skin conditions is itch. Itch can be very debilitating and affect your sleep, which can lead to mental and physical exhaustion, causing problems with concentration and mood, and impacting on school, work and affecting personal and family relationships (Sue Lewis Jones 2006).

**Visibility**

Eczema is a very visible condition, often affecting areas such as the face, neck and hands. This not only affects your self-esteem and confidence, but can leave you feeling embarrassed to show your skin or reluctant to mix with others, which can lead to you feeling very alone and isolated.

**Stigma**

The visual stigma around having a skin condition can lead to individuals, especially children, being bullied and teased about their skin and appearance. This form of peer group rejection may lead to loss of self-esteem, confidence, mood changes, anxiety and depression.

**Lifestyle**

Having atopic eczema can lead to a restriction in lifestyle activities, such as affecting clothing choices, pet ownership, sporting, hobby and career choices, especially if the activity involves a trigger allergen or irritant that can worsen the eczema.

**Financial burden**

Taking care of atopic eczema not only has an impact on physical and mental health, but can also be very time consuming and expensive. The cost of attending appointments, time off school or work, cost of treatments and increase in clothing and laundry costs can place a great burden and stress on individuals and families.
Tips on how to cope with atopic eczema to improve your mental health

During difficult, busy and stressful times it may seem difficult to maintain any routine, but it is essential that you try to keep up a good skin care routine to prevent any further worsening of your eczema. This routine should include your regular emollient therapy, topical treatments and any other medication required to help manage your eczema.

If you feel stressed or anxious sometimes meditation, mindfulness, distraction techniques or breathing exercises can be helpful and the following tips may be useful.

These tips can help to reduce stress and improve your mental health:

- Take time to relax and de-stress:
- Go for a walk
- Take a warm not hot bath
- Read a book
- Meet up with friends
- Try a new hobby or sport

Some useful online resources to support your mental health:

- Skin support - https://www.skinsupport.org.uk/
- Getselfhelp - https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/

Feelings of low mood, anxiety and depression are common when you have eczema and there are lots of different types of support resources available online and through your pharmacist or GP practice.

If you have concerns about your mood or general wellbeing, it is important that you seek help, you can discuss your feelings with your healthcare professional who will be able to offer support and advice.

Further information, support and resources can be found at:

www.allergyuk.org

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Web chat: allergyuk.org
Email: info@allergyuk.org
References

- Allergy UK. Seeing Red report: Getting Under the Skin of Adult Severe Eczema. UK 2017
- All party parliamentary group on skin (APPGS) The psychological and social impact of skin disease on people’s lives. London 2013.
- All party parliamentary group on skin (APPGS). Mental health and skin disease. London 2020
We’re here to help

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