

ECZEMA & ALLERGIES

HOW CLOSELY ARE THEY RELATED?

If you have eczema then you may well also have allergies. Studies, however have demonstrated that if one or both of your parents have either eczema, or seasonal allergies, you are more likely to have or had some form of eczema...

Catriona Williams, talkhealth, Director



If you had eczema as a child, or are caring for a child with eczema, you'll know that you are more likely to also have allergies or sensitivity to foods such as eggs, nuts, dairy, and wheat. You may also be prone to airborne allergies such as hay fever or allergic rhinitis. Whilst the link between these conditions has been established, more scientific research is being undertaken with the aim of finding ways to help patients manage their condition better.

talkhealth, one of the leading online

patient health communities in the UK, have recently (September 2017) undertaken research directly from the patient perspective to see how closely the two are linked and how supportive the medical profession are in acknowledging and helping people with these two conditions.

SURVEY INSIGHTS AND OVERVIEW

Concentrating purely on those survey participants who stated they either have eczema or have had it in the past, of which



The most common allergy reported was hay fever, with 85% of people with eczema also stating they lived with some form of hay fever



there were 592, a significant percentage also reported on having or experiencing some type of allergy. When asking the medical profession about a formal diagnosis or a connection between their eczema and their allergy symptoms, just under half were told that both their eczema and their allergy were connected. The most common allergy reported was hay fever, with 85% of people with eczema also stating they lived with some form of hay fever. The second most reported allergy, but significantly lower at 38%, was food allergy, with dairy products accounting for just over half of those who recorded a food allergy. Once people had a flare up with their allergy, regardless of the type of allergy, 8 out of 10 people said they experienced an issue with their eczema which became notably worse, or they experienced a flare up.

People found that managing the two issues together was very difficult to cope with, although managing eczema was deemed slightly the more difficult condition to control than an allergy. Experiences with the medical profession were certainly mixed, with only the minority receiving lots of helpful information, over half receiving some support and 1 in 3 receiving absolutely no information or further support about either their eczema or allergy. This was also reflected in the onward referral to a consultant with just a third being referred on for more in-depth and specialist treatment.

It would seem though, if you are one of the luckier ones to have been referred onwards, you would be offered an allergy

“ I get hives and itching, which of course causes me to scratch and in turn makes my eczema become worse. It cracks and bleeds. I then have raised welts which sometimes become infected. ”

test. It was at this point that just over half of people were then provided with a formal diagnosis of the connection between their eczema and their allergy along with a list of identifiable allergens that could trigger their eczema. To get to this stage of diagnosis took, for some, a number of years. Having



“ My food allergy to wheat makes my skin a lot more itchy, which results in my skin becoming more dry and cracked. ”

DEBORAH'S STORY...

My daughter, Alice, had eczema from the age of 5 years, and it was severe, requiring weekly appointments with my GP. I was one of the fortunate ones as my GP told me that there was a chance my daughter could develop asthma and allergies. However, this didn't really prepare me for the long road ahead, a road that took over a year to get a referral to an allergist. The referral was not because of her eczema but that Alice was due to have her MMR injection and I'd read that the MMR vaccine, was at the time, cultured on egg white.

As Alice had experienced an anaphylactic shock to eggs, I was able to get a referral for a 'challenge test' at my local hospital. Alice had had an anaphylactic shock twice before when she'd eaten egg. The first time, despite all the classic symptoms, I had no idea what it was. I thought she was just tired, and yet I now know she was feeling faint. I thought she was sick because she'd over-eaten but I now understand it was her body's way of getting rid of the allergen from her system. I also didn't realise that her laboured breathing was because of the anaphylactic shock, as she'd recently recovered from a cold and I thought it could possibly be returning.

I believe that each time a person is exposed to the allergen, the reaction can get worse. So I feel very lucky that on the second occasion Alice had eggs, she experienced the same symptoms, slightly worse, but this time I took her straight to A&E. I was then

told about anaphylaxis, how to recognise the symptoms, to be prepared for other shocks (which there were then several) and prescribed an auto-injector pen to use should the symptoms become life-threatening. I should add that I was given no training on how to use an auto-injector pen, just told to imagine, should I need to use it, that I was stabbing an orange!

When some years passed and we had no cause to use the auto-injector pen, my GP told me that there was no further need for her to carry one, or keep one at school. Instead, she was prescribed some strong steroid tablets that we were told she should take should she experience any symptoms of anaphylaxis. She has had to take these twice. Once at a festival as the grass, or something in the grass, affected her and on the second occasion when she was bitten by a horse fly.

There does seem generally to be a lack of education around the links between eczema and allergies, and the treatments that are available, along with a general lack of educational information.



been given a formal diagnosis and a list of potential triggers, it would seem in general that the advice given was just to avoid these to better manage your skin.

One of the most frightening aspects of having an allergy is the possibility of having an

anaphylactic shock, which can result in very serious consequences, and in some death. An anaphylactic shock is when someone experiences an allergic reaction to something, such as a sting from a bee, or something they have eaten. The symptoms are marked by how either rapidly they take effect on the person or how the condition worsens, causing one or more of the following symptoms, swelling of the throat or tongue, difficulty breathing, an itchy rash, being physically sick and suffering from feeling faint or lightheaded. The talkhealth survey found that nearly 1 in 10 people that have eczema and allergies have experienced an anaphylactic shock. However from this 'at risk' category, 5% had not even heard of what an anaphylactic shock was. Of the people that had experienced an anaphylactic shock, just under half were offered an auto injector (a medical device that is designed to administer specific drugs), 26%

“ Flare up caused by allergies makes me stressed and stress in turn makes my eczema worse. ”

were prescribed an alternative treatment and 26% were offered no other form of treatment.

Lastly, survey participants were asked about their opinion of the professional medical advice they were offered. Just over half felt their GPs were not trained adequately to be able to diagnose and offer support around the impact of allergies on eczema.

The results of the survey are extremely alarming and conclude the necessity for further education and awareness to be provided to the healthcare professionals in order they can recognise the relationship between the two conditions. Also more education must be provided to those with eczema so they can better understand the close connection between the two conditions and to be alert for any signs of allergic reactions.

FURTHER INFORMATION



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Talkhealth Partnership Ltd

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