

the Eczema diet

**Discover how to
stop & prevent
the itch of eczema
through diet &
nutrition**

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Skin Basics

Did You Know?

Your skin is the largest organ of your body. It is made up of three layers: the outside layer is the epidermis, the middle layer is the dermis and the inner layer is the subcutaneous layer.

Your skin is not only something you hope (and pray) looks good as you step out of your front door each day; like your heart and lungs, your skin is a vital organ that keeps you alive. Your skin is a barrier and a filter between the outside world and your insides, which is why the outermost layer, the stratum corneum, is known as “the skin barrier” (see Diagram 1). The skin barrier helps to protect your body from excessive water loss so you don’t die from dehydration. It helps to regulate your body temperature so you don’t “cook” your internal organs and it protects you from invading microbes such as dust mites and bacteria. A normal skin barrier is thick and the outermost layers of dead skin cells flake off in a barely detectable manner, as the outermost binders snap and release the unwanted cells.

Skin Barrier Function

A useful way to describe the basic structural changes the skin goes through when you have eczema is demonstrated in the “brick wall” model of the skin, which was created by professor Michael Cork and colleagues Danby and Hunter from the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. In this model, skin cells are likened to bricks which are held together by iron rods (binders called corneodesmosomes) and mortar (lipids, which are fats).

When you have eczema, the skin barrier is usually thinner than normal so its protective capacity is compromised. The binders that hold the skin cells together in the deeper layers of the skin snap too early, causing premature flaking of the skin, and the fatty lipids in between your skin cells have cracks which appear throughout the skin barrier.

Irritants, including soaps and detergents, enhance the snapping off process of the binders, the skin cells break down prematurely and deeper cracks appear in the skin. As the skin barrier breaks down, the cracks allow allergens, such as dust mites and bacteria, to enter the skin. This contributes to flare-ups and can lead to infections and immune responses, including allergic reactions.

Eczema Diagnosis

Eczema is generally diagnosed using the following criteria. Firstly, you must have itchy skin, plus three or more of the following symptoms:

- Itchiness in the skin creases, such as the folds behind the knees and elbows, fronts of the ankles or around the neck (children under four years may also have it on their cheeks)
- Dry skin
- Visible eczema affecting the outer limbs, cheeks or forehead
- Symptoms appearing within two years of birth (not always an indication, but very common)
- Family history of asthma, hay fever or (if under four years old) a history of atopic disease in a first-degree relative.

The Acid Mantle

With the exception of newborn babies (who have a skin pH of close to neutral), healthy skin has an acidic pH of approximately 5.5. This is known as the “acid mantle.” The acid mantle protects the skin from harmful microbes, decreases the colonization of “free-loading” pathogenic bacteria and fungus, and promotes the adhesion to the skin of beneficial (non-pathogenic) bacteria. Research shows that eczema sufferers can have skin that is not acidic enough, making the skin barrier less protective and practically defenceless against microbes, such as dust mites and *staphylococcus aureus*.

Historical eczema prescriptions

In *The British Medical Journal* back in 1882, a doctor described a diet that rapidly cured his eczema-afflicted patients. He documented a particularly “hopeless case” of a nine-year-old boy who had suffered from eczema since he was five months old. The child had been under constant medical care, in and out of hospitals for more than eight years and no prescribed treatment, cream or drug had ever improved his eczema. When he was admitted to hospital for eczema treatment on this occasion, the doctor placed the child on a modified diet. The diet was low in fat, dairy-free and sugar-free. All fat was cut off meats, and poultry was recommended instead of pork. An oil supplement was prescribed. Beef broth was given, with the fat carefully skimmed off and he ate baked fish, not fried.

Did You Know?

Know your lingo

Atopic: describes an allergy-prone individual and includes eczema, asthma and hay fever.

Dermatitis: any generalized inflammation of the skin.

Eczema: derived from a Greek word meaning “to boil out.”

Healthy Liver, Healthy Skin

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Did You Know?

Your liver filters more than a quart (1 L) of blood per minute and receives a dual blood supply: one containing freshly oxygenated blood from the heart, and the other supplying blood from the stomach and intestines, rich with newly absorbed nutrients from your diet, as well as toxins, microbes, drugs and hormones.

The liver is the second largest organ in the body (after the skin) and it performs a range of important body functions which can greatly affect the appearance of your skin. Your liver filters more than a quart (1 L) of blood per minute and receives a dual blood supply: one containing freshly oxygenated blood from the heart, and the other supplying blood from the stomach and intestines, rich with newly absorbed nutrients from your diet, as well as toxins, microbes, drugs and hormones. The liver plays a vital role in detoxifying these substances so the blood remains healthy, and it assists with supplying the body with nutrients for beautiful skin.

Phase 1 Liver Detoxification (and why it can make your skin worse)

Food and chemical sensitivities can indicate that your Phase 1 and/or Phase 2 detoxification pathways are imbalanced. Most drugs and food chemicals are processed through a Phase 1 reaction involving cytochrome P450 enzymes. Their role is to make toxic substances water-soluble so they can be further processed during Phase 2 of liver detoxification. Malfunctioning Phase 1 or Phase 2 liver detoxification reactions have been implicated in adverse reactions to drugs.

Phase 1 can greatly increase free radical production, which can damage DNA and cause genetic mutations if your diet is not rich in antioxidants. When Phase 1 detoxification is high you can experience a worsening of symptoms and you may feel lethargic, and it is around this time that antihistamine drugs are often prescribed.

Antihistamine medications can make you temporarily feel better as they can mask the symptoms, but there is a catch: antihistamine medications temporarily block Phase 1 liver detoxification. This is not ideal as blocking liver detoxification reactions creates an increased workload for your kidneys and your skin, as both are left with the task of chemical waste elimination.

Acid–Alkaline Balance

There is another way to help your liver detoxify problematic chemicals: by consuming foods that have an alkalizing effect in the body. Keeping your diet in acid–alkaline balance promotes healthy blood and strong bones and it gives your skin a healthy glow. Do you remember learning about acids and bases at school? Your food does more than stop the hunger pangs and boost your energy; once your meal is digested it releases either an acid or an alkaline base into your bloodstream.

Your blood needs to be slightly alkaline at a pH between 7.35 and 7.45 to be healthy and your body will do all it can to keep the blood within these limits (more on this in a moment). pH means “potential of hydrogen” and on the pH scale 0 is strongly acidic, 7 is neutral and up to 14 is strongly alkaline.

Did You Know?

Your blood needs to be slightly alkaline at a pH between 7.35 and 7.45 to be healthy.

How to Monitor Your pH

Your pH changes throughout the day as each meal and drink influences your blood, urine, saliva and tissue pH readings. You can test your urine and saliva pH at home, several times a day if you wish, using a pH test kit containing litmus paper (these test kits are available from some health food shops and online). The saliva test measures your body tissue pH and it should be done about 30 minutes after eating or drinking. When you test your urine pH (this is the preferred test) the amount of acids your kidneys are excreting is measured. It is useful to monitor your pH several times a day, for at least two weeks, so you can see for yourself how your diet affects your pH (also keep in mind that stress can cause an acid reading).

Easy Roast Chicken

Makes 4 servings

This hearty meal is gluten-free, contains alkalizing vegetables and is high in protein. It contains a moderate amount of salicylates.

Tip

Use leftover chicken meat to make Country Chicken Soup (page 239).

Variation

You can steam the veggies instead of roasting, and serve this meal with Eczema-Safe Gravy (page 242).

Nutrients per serving	
Calories	410
Total Fat	4.2 g
Saturated Fat	0.8 g
Omega-3	1.0 g
Carbohydrate	65 g
Fiber	4.0 g (20% DV)
Protein	21 g
Biotin	120 mcg (40% DV)
Vitamin C	80 mg (70% DV)
Iron	2.1 mg (12% DV)
Magnesium	12 mg (10% DV)
Zinc	16 mg (40% DV)

- Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C)
- Large, deep baking dish with a wire rack
- Large baking sheet, lined with parchment paper

1	4-lb (2 kg) whole chicken	1
	Rice bran oil	
	Celtic sea salt	
	Garlic powder	
8	potatoes, peeled and chopped	8
4	carrots, sliced on diagonal	4
1/2	sweet potato, peeled and sliced	1/2
4	Brussels sprouts	4
2	handfuls green beans, ends trimmed	2

1. Rinse the chicken both inside and out and pat the outside dry with a paper towel. Rub rice bran oil over the chicken and then sprinkle with salt and garlic powder. Place the chicken upside down on rack in baking dish. For an extra-tender roast, pour 1 cup (250 mL) of water into the bottom of the dish (ensuring the water does not touch the chicken). Roast the chicken for 30 minutes, then turn right side up.
2. In a large bowl, toss potatoes, carrots and sweet potato with a little oil and sea salt. Spread in a single layer on prepared baking sheet. Add to oven and roast veggies and chicken for 1 hour, turning veggies often, until veggies are tender and an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the chicken breast registers 165°F (74°C). Transfer chicken to a cutting board, cover with foil and let rest for 10 minutes before carving.
3. Meanwhile, in a steamer set over a saucepan of boiling water, steam Brussels sprouts for 2 minutes. Add beans and steam for 3 to 4 minutes or until tender-crisp. Serve steamed veggies alongside chicken and roasted veggies.

Baked Fish with Mash

Makes 4 servings

Trout is succulent and rich in omega-3 fatty acids, and the green beans and Brussels sprouts are alkalizing. This recipe contains a moderate amount of salicylates.

Tip

Each serving size of fish should be around the size of the palm of your hand. Fish is usually sold in large pieces so you will probably only need half of one fillet per adult.

Variations

If you are vegetarian or vegan, use lentils, tofu, chickpeas or beans instead of fish.

For a creamy mash add soy milk.

Nutrients per serving	
Calories	250
Total Fat	4.2 g
Saturated Fat	0.8 g
Omega-3	1.0 g
Carbohydrate	65 g
Fiber	4.0 g (20% DV)
Protein	21 g
Biotin	120 mcg (40% DV)
Vitamin C	80 mg (70% DV)
Iron	2.1 mg (12% DV)
Magnesium	12 mg (10% DV)
Zinc	16 mg (40% DV)

- Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C)
- Baking dish, lined with parchment paper

1	sweet potato, peeled and diced	1
3	potatoes, peeled and diced	3
	Splash organic soy milk	
	Celtic sea salt (optional), to taste	
2	trout fillets, halved lengthwise	2
	Rice bran oil	
1	small handful flat-leaf parsley, washed and chopped, stems removed	1
	Garlic powder, to taste	
3	handfuls green beans, ends trimmed	3
4	Brussels sprouts	4

1. Steam the sweet potato and potato over a steamer using a little water, for 15 minutes or until very soft (reserve the water for steaming the greens). Mash the potato and add soy milk (you may need 1/4 cup/60 mL), sprinkle with Celtic sea salt if desired and set aside.
2. Place the fish in prepared baking dish, lightly coat it with rice bran oil and top with parsley and garlic powder. Bake in preheated oven for 8–10 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork (time will vary depending on the thickness of the fish).
3. Steam the green beans and Brussels sprouts until tender and reheat the mash before serving.

the Eczema diet

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Acknowledgments

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