

ITCHING TO KNOW ABOUT ECZEMA



Text Type: Informational report
Suggested finishing time: 15 mins

Let's Think!

1. Do you know what eczema is?
2. Does any of your friends have it?

Eczema: a daunting torment

[1] Also known as atopic dermatitis, eczema is a chronic, inflammatory skin condition which is characterised by severe itching and irritation. In Hong Kong, one in five people suffer from it at different stages of their lives. But on the bright side, it is not contagious, that is to say, not spread by physical contact with another person.

Symptoms

[2] Eczema can develop in any part of the skin, mostly in the creases of elbows and knees. Patients suffer similar symptoms: dryness and itchiness of the affected areas as well as red patches on them. In more severe cases, tiny fluid-filled blisters formed under the skin may burst and ooze onto the surface of the skin, causing the skin to flake when it dries up. Constant itch-scratching should be avoided as it may lead to bleeding, infection and scars.

Causes

[3] Although there is no conclusive explanation of why eczema occurs, allergies and an overactive immune system have long been considered its potential triggers. It is found that eczema tends to develop in people who have other allergies such as hay fever and asthma. Possibly, it is the frenzied immune system that has masterminded the reactions with bacteria or fungus, which lead to infection. But lacking concrete evidence, we just do not have a definite answer to what the main culprit of eczema is.

Worsening factors

[4] Winter is the worst season for patients with eczema, since it is the time when our immune

system feels 'under the weather', that is to say, gets weaker. Besides, the low humidity in winter causes the skin to lose its moisture sooner and in greater quantity. And winter clothes, say woollen jackets with tingly texture, can irritate the skin even more. Some patients, in order to keep warm, may reduce outings, stay home, and take hot showers—a seemingly effective way of relieving itchiness. Yet, heat is one of the many factors that may exacerbate eczema, especially because hot water will wash away the layer of oil on our skin, which keeps the water underneath it from vaporising, hence the patients' tendency to scratch the dry and worsening skin more frequently.

Treatment

[5] At present, no absolute cure exists for eczema. Still, flare-ups or outbreaks may be kept in check in many ways. The easiest way is to adjust one's lifestyle—by, say, avoiding allergens such as food and drinks made from dairy and nuts. Using milder soaps and tepid water while bathing has been suggested as a way to keep the skin moist. Applying moisturising lotion afterwards also helps. While treatments of this incurable condition vary considerably from doctor to doctor, medicated creams remain the most common medication for the intolerable itchiness.

~450 words

More to Take Away

Medical studies have shown that eczema has become commoner in babies and children than ever. Though the cause of this is still unknown, it has been proven that diet is not a critical factor.

STEAM CLASSROOM

Closely related to genes, eczema is likely to develop in a child if one of his or her parents has it. Eczema is found in about one-fifth of the under-five children. Among them, about half will remain vulnerable to it even after they grow up.

Looking into Grammar



Participial phrases are used to give additional information about the subject in the sentence to which it is attached. It should only describe the subject of the sentence.

- ✓ Suffering from shyness, Aaron is reluctant to speak to strangers.
- ✗ Suffering from shyness, Aaron's mum knows her son is reluctant to speak to strangers.

 Circle TWO participial phrases in the informational report.

Part A Multiple Choice Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the informational report. Choose the best answer by blackening the appropriate circle.

1. Eczema _____.
- A. is age-specific and gender-specific
 - B. is transmittable unless there is social distancing
 - C. is exclusive to residents in Hong Kong
 - D. results in rashes and scaly sensitive skin
2. Which of the following may be a symptom of eczema?
- Q2: Nails are irrelevant as eczema is a skin condition. Patches on thighs suggest a consequence of itch-scratching. Option A matches the symptoms of dryness and itchiness.*
- A. dead skin falling from an itchy scalp
 - B. inflamed patches on thighs
 - C. pale swollen lips
 - D. brittle peeling nails
-  3. Which of the following is TRUE?
- A. The allergens that induce eczema are unknown.
 - B. The weather when eczema rages is extreme.
 - C. Why eczema exists as a medical condition is still uncertain.
 - D. Signs of eczema vary depending on patients' geographic location.
4. In paragraph 3, the word 'conclusive' means _____.
- A. likely and profound
 - B. proven and convincing
 - C. accurate and in-depth
 - D. academic and comprehensive
5. In paragraph 3, the writer considers the overactivity of the immune system _____.
- A. the underlying reason of eczema
 - B. the likely strike to eczema
 - C. a negative outcome of eczema
 - D. a situation in which patients of eczema may end up
- 5** Distinguish between the root cause and the inducing factors.
6. Eczema _____ intensify _____.
- A. will not...despite the low humidity
 - B. is likely to...when people dress in too many layers
 - C. may not...unless people scratch more often
 - D. will...when people stay indoors for too long
- 6** Find out what worsens the skin condition. Pay attention to the cohesive device in each option.
7. In paragraph 5, 'kept in check' can best be replaced by '_____'.
 A. inhibited and minimised
 B. evaluated and alleviated
 C. detected and improved
 D. monitored and restricted
-  8. Which of the following is an opinion about treatments of eczema?
- A. They do not put an end to it.
 - B. A change in lifestyle is feasible.
 - C. A standardised solution is missing.
 - D. none of the above



Self-evaluation
Checklist

Please scan the QR code on P.6 to access the checklist for evaluating your own reading progress.

Part B Pre-HKDSE Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the informational report. For question 1, answer in a complete sentence.

1 How do patients of eczema feel?

1. What does the title 'Eczema: a daunting torment' suggest about eczema? Explain your answer.
(Any reasonable answers)


The title suggests that eczema is a skin condition from which the patients go through great mental and physical suffering owing to incurable and intolerable itchiness.

2. Look for words or phrases in the informational report that are similar in meaning to the following:


(i) oversensitive (<i>adj.</i>)	<u>frenzied</u>	(para. 3)
(ii) worsen (<i>v.</i>)	<u>exacerbate</u>	(para. 4)
(iii) unwell (<i>idm.</i>)	<u>under the weather</u>	(para. 4)
(iv) to a large degree (<i>adv.</i>)	<u>considerably</u>	(para. 5)

3. The writer is going to add one more paragraph to the informational report. It would most probably be about _____.

- A. comparisons with other skin conditions B. statistics on eczema cases
 C. dermatologists and their clinics D. case studies of full recovery

-  4. Determine whether each of the following statements is a fact, opinion, or undecidable because not enough information is given.

Statement	Fact	Opinion	Not Given
(i) Eczema patients are advised to take lukewarm showers.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(ii) The tingly woollen products are irritating.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(iii) Medicated creams contain moisturising formulae.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

-  5. Determine whether each of the following statements is true, false, or undecidable because not enough information is given.

Statement	True	False	Not Given
(i) The eczema patients make up more than a quarter of the population in Hong Kong.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(ii) Science has not been able to explain the cause of eczema as yet.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(iii) Most skin conditions are related to allergies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Q5: (i) Only one-fifth of the Hong Kong population suffers from eczema, hence less than a quarter. (iii) The informational report only covers one skin condition, namely eczema, while other skin conditions are unmentioned.

5 A true statement can be made undecidable by the addition of a single word or description.

Part C Vocabulary Bank

Label the pictures below with the idioms about health and illnesses from the word box.

go under the knife black and blue
 be at death's door on your last legs
 have a frog in your throat be green around the gills

to have a medical operation



1. go under the knife

to have difficulty in speaking
because of a dry and
hoarse throat



2. have a frog in your throat

to be critically ill



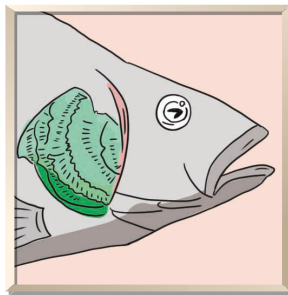
3. be at death's door

very tired or near to death



4. on your last legs

to look ill and pale



5. be green around the gills

with bruises on your skin



6. black and blue

Word Craft

Itching to do something (Refer to P.82.) (*idm.*) (=wanting to do something very much)
Itchiness (Refer to P.82.) (*n.*) (=an uneasy irritating condition)
Itch (*n.*) (=an uneasy irritating sensation)

e.g. Jenna is **itching to purchase** the game in short supply.
 Mint offers quick relief from the **itchiness** of mosquito bites.
 The fleas gave Noel's cat an **itch** on its back.

Let's Discuss!

- Do you agree that the climate and living condition in Hong Kong makes its residents more vulnerable to eczema?
- What do you think one should do when he or she is faced with an incurable health condition?