

Eczema: Cause and Treatment in Ayurvedic Perspective

Causes and Treatment of Eczema in Ayurveda

A Review of The Literature

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January, 2016

Big interest in eczema treatment is found all over the world due to the high percent of people affected by this disease. According to WebMD, Eczema is a skin condition caused by inflammation of the skin.⁽¹⁾ Roughly 40% of the population worldwide has eczema, nowadays, and this number is constantly growing. The skin has a functional relationship with the internal organs and the glands of internal secretion. Therefore, any impairment of those functions contributes to the development of eczema and dermatitis. Since eczema has such a broad definition, it subdivides into multiple types and can be mild, moderate or severe. It is common for eczema to become chronic. Important to know that eczema is not contagious, and western medicine can not fully cure it.

Itching is surely the primary symptom in patients suffering from eczema. Indeed, more often than not itching comes before the rash appears on the skin.⁽¹⁾ Eczema is characterized by dry, itchy patches on the skin that usually appear on the hands, neck, face and legs, even though they can be found in any part of the body. Severe itching causes constant scratching that leads to skin bleeding, Therefore making the skin vulnerable to further inflammation. This is known as "itch-scratch cycle."⁽²⁾ Eczema is usually diagnosed in childhood and it becomes less severe in adulthood. Infants get eczema on their faces, cheeks, or necks. At times, Eczema can start in adulthood. It also goes through remission cycles that can sometimes last for several years. Eczema can not be cured, yet the symptoms can be successfully treated.

Varies factors are known to contribute to eczema flare-ups, yet the etiology of this disease is unknown. Modern dermatologists suggest that some of the external factors include the impact of certain substances with significant allergenic properties and the negative impact of preservatives, dyes and other substances added to food, as well as synthetic clothing and various household products. Eczema is often triggered by ordinary food such as chocolate, citrus fruits, nuts and meat broth. Some people develop inflammation of the skin due to prolonged use of specific drugs; contact with house dust and pollen of plants daily. Genetic predisposition is surely one of the main internal causes that provoke the appearance of eczema. If someone in the family suffers from this disease, then the rest of the family is at very high risk of having it in the future. Furthermore, the inflammatory process in the skin may be caused by a variety of serious problems in the immune system. These include the reduction in the activity of T-lymphocytes and increasing the number of B-lymphocytes. Many doctors agree that there is a link between eczema and asthma or/and hay fever. This is the reason doctors will monitor children with eczema for a future development of asthma or hay fever.⁽²⁾ Stress is another trigger of eczema, even though it's not fully understood how they correlate.

Eczema comes in many forms and can look different at various times or appear in various part of the body. Therefore, there are many types of eczema described. The main

types that the majority of scientists agree upon are atopic dermatitis, contact dermatitis, seborrheic dermatitis, dyshidrotic eczema, nummular, neurodermatitis, stasis and hand eczema.

Table 1: Types of Eczema

Type of eczema	Symptoms	Visual Aid
<p>Atopic Dermatitis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Considered a more severe form of eczema. - Almost always begins in childhood typically affects the insides of the elbows, backs of the knees, and the face, but can cover most of the body ⁽²⁾ - Often appears in people with genetic predisposition, who have asthma or hay fever; who has defects of the skin barrier causing imbalances in skin functions. ⁽¹⁾ 	 <p>(3)</p>
<p>Contact Dermatitis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caused by skin contacting certain substances that lead to skin inflammation. - Common irritants include solvents, industrial chemicals, detergents, fumes, tobacco smoke, paints, bleach, woolen fabrics, acidic foods, astringents and other alcohol (excluding cetyl alcohol) containing skin care products, and some soaps and fragrances. Allergens are usually an animal or vegetable proteins from foods, pollens, or pets ⁽²⁾ 	 <p>(3)</p>

<p>Seborrheic Dermatitis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - known as cradle cap in infants - characterized by redness, itching, and dry, flaky skin. - Outbreaks of the pathological process are localized mainly on the areas of skin that are rich in sebaceous glands (scalp, ears, face, shoulder blades, axillary region, etc 	 <p>(3)</p>
<p>Dyshidrotic eczema</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - small itchy blisters on hands and feet 	 <p>(3)</p>
<p>Nummular eczema (also known as discoid eczema and nummular dermatitis)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - well-defined, coin-shaped dark spots on the skin. - can be very itchy or not itchy at all; can be very dry and scaly or wet and open 	 <p>(3)</p>
<p>Neurodermatitis (also known as lichen simplex chronicus)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - thick and rough patches that develop in the area of constant rubbing or scratching - patches become discolored with time 	 <p>(3)</p>

<p>Stasis dermatitis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - due to problems with veins such as varicose veins or malfunction of valves, the pressure builds up resulting in fluid leaking from veins into the skin - characterized by swelling, redness, scaling and itching 	 <p>(3)</p>
<p>Hand eczema (also known as hand dermatitis)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - very common due to regular contact with irritants and allergens such as chemicals. - Characterized by red, itchy, dry skin with cracks and blisters 	 <p>(3)</p>

Modern pharmacology offers very large variety of medications to treat eczema. Nevertheless, it is not always possible to remove the symptoms entirely. For the treatment of eczema doctors resorted to anti-allergic drugs, glucocorticoid ointments and pills, sedatives and vitamins. Antibiotics are often used for the treatment of microbial eczema. In some cases, patients with eczema can be prescribed a course of acupuncture. An important point in the treatment of eczema is a healthy diet. Eczema patients are recommended to minimize the consumption of citrus fruits, mushrooms and meat broths. Treatment of eczema is assigned depending on the stage of the disease. During the initial phase of eczema, which is characterized by redness only, the patient will be assigned a local therapy, which includes various powder mashes, lotions, and ointments. Treatment of chronic eczema includes ointments, ultraviolet light therapy, and corticosteroids to name a few. Moreover, it is wise to keep the eczema patches away from external stimuli such as strong wind, cold snow, etc. It helps to eliminate the eczema patches from contact with fur and wool, as they can worsen the disease process.

Overall, the treatment methods of eczema are very diverse just as the disease itself. In mild cases, specific diet and, or lifestyle changes can remove the symptoms. In severe cases, even the corticosteroids may not be able to treat eczema entirely. As general guidelines, people suffering from eczema should take short, warm showers, while using mild soap and then soft, smooth towel to avoid rubbing the skin. Patients should avoid spicy, fatty foods and hot, humid atmosphere; they should wear loose, cotton clothes and avoid synthetic fibers, as

they prevent perspiration. Stress reduction is another necessity in eczema treatment. In severe cases, western medicine offers treatments with hydrocortisone, antihistamines, corticosteroids, ultraviolet light therapy, immunosuppressants, immunomodulators and strong prescription moisturizers⁽¹⁾

Ayurvedic perspective

Classification

According to Ayurveda, Eczema is similar to Vicharchika. The symptoms are Kandu(excessiveitching),Pidika(boil,/pustule),syava(discoloration/hyperpigmentation), bahusrava(profuse oozing)and later raji(marked linings/lichenification/criss-cross marking), ruja(pain) and sarUksa(excessive dryness). The Vicharchika is considered to be one of Kushdra kushtas which is skin disorder.⁽⁴⁾ There are 18 types of kustha, Charaka defines the kustha into two categories, seven types of leprosy and 11 types of skin diseases, the chart as follows.

Table 2: Types of Leprosy:⁽⁵⁾

Name	Dosha	Symptoms
Kapala Kustha	V predomi nant	It looks like a black and reddish piece of earthen jar. It is rough, coarse, thin and exceedingly painful.
Audumbara Kustha	P	It is associated with burning sensation, itching, pain and redness, brown skin hairs. It looks like ripe fruit of udumbara.
Mandala Kustha	K predomi nant	White, red, stable, extensive, unctuous, with raised patches and jained with each other.
Rsya-jihva Kustha	V-P	It is rough, with red margins, internally blackish, painful. It looks similar to the tongue of rsya (type of antelope).
Pundarika Kustha	K-P	It is whitish, with red margins, raised, simulating lotus petals and with burning sensation.
Sidhma Kustha	V-K	It is white, coppery, thin, leaves out dust-like powder on rubbing and simulates flowers of bottle gourd. It appears mostly on the chest.
Kakanaka Kustha	V-P-K	It looks like gunja sees in colour, does not suppurate and is exceedingly painful. It has symptoms of all 3 doshas.

Table 3, the 11 Minor Types of Skin Disease (Non-Leprotic) ⁽⁶⁾

Name	Doshas	Symptoms
Ekakusths	V-K	It does not perspire, is extensive and looks like fish scales.
Carmakhya type	V-K	It is thick-skinned like an elephant
Kitibha	V-K	It is blackish, rough like a corn and coarse.
Vipadika	V-K	The term used for [sensation of] the tearing of hands and feet with excessive pain
Alasaka	V-K	the whole patient/the whole location of skin lesion] is covered with itching and red glandular pimples.
Dadru	V-K	It has raised patch associated with itching, redness and pimples
Carmadala	P-K	It is red, associated with itching, eruptions and pain, leaves off flakes and has tenderness.
Pama	P-K	Consists of pimples which are white redish and blackish and having excessive itching.
Visphota	P-K	It is white and reddish having thin-walled eruptions.
Sataru	P-K	It is red or blackish, associated with burning sensation and pain and consisting multiple boils.
Vicarcika	K	It consists of pimples which are itchy, blackish and with excessive discharge

In agreement with the table 3, Kapha is predominant dosha of Vicarcika, However Charaka clearly states "All types of Kustha are caused by the three doshas together, so predominance or a minimal role of each dosha must be determined from the respective symptoms. All types of Kustha are caused by the three doshas together, so predominance or minimal role of each dosha must be determined from the respective symptoms"⁽⁷⁾. Charaka also goes that" is not difficult to treat Kustha which is predominant in V-K or any single dosha, It is hard to treat kustha As which is predominant in K-P or V-P."⁽⁸⁾

Etiology

Charaka defined these following people tends to be skin disorders:⁽⁹⁾

- who habitually take incompatible food items and incompatible food liquids
- who habitually take unctuous and heavy substances
- who suppress the natural urges (particularly of vomiting)
- who are exposed to physical exercise and/or intense heat after eating excessively who use cold, hot, lightening measures and diet against the prescribed order who apply cold water immediately after intense exposure to the sun, exertion or fear
- who take food during indigestion and when the previous meal is not properly digested
- who use contra-indicated items while undergoing pancakarma therapy who use excessively new cereals
- who use curd, fish, salt and sour substances.

- who indulge in eating black gram, radish (rice) flour preparations, sesame, milk and jiggery -
- who have intercourse during indigestion
- who sleep regularly during the day
- who insult the Brahmanas, teachers (and other respectable persons) who indulge in sinful activities.

Charaka continues If a person takes improper food combination, improper timing of meal consumption, and excessively, constantly takes heavy, sour and hot quality of foods leads to a skin disorder. He also articulated that exposed in excess heat or sudden exposure to cold water contribute to Kusthas⁽¹⁰⁾. If food takes improperly, the foods produce the toxin (ama) in a body Ama vitiates all dosha in balance.⁽¹¹⁾

Susruta also states that when Kapha and Pitta become aggravated by these activities, Vata gets aggravated as well. Then Vata moves through the veins/ blood spreading sideward, conveys Pitta and Kapha to the skin all over the body. If it is not treated, aggravated dosha gets through into deeper dhatu and these vitiated dosha manifests as a skin disease.⁽¹²⁾

Ayurvedic Treatment

There is limited information regarding specific Vicharchika treatment, Ayurveda treats Vicharchika based on symptoms of patients. As it mentioned earlier, Kushta is caused by more than one dosha vitiation. Also, Rakta(blood) vitiation is one of the contributions for Vicharchika. As said by Charaka, He simply stated the treatment of Kushta with four following procedures.

- 1) the pathogenic factors are eliminated [vamana/ virechana/ basti]
- 2) blood is let out
- 3) external remedial measures [pastes/ baths/ scraping/ etc.]
- 4) internal remedial measures [pastes/ decoctions/ ect.]
- 5) unction is administered [ghrtas/ tailas]⁽¹³⁾

Vamana :

It is known as emesis therapy. It is the first of the five principle therapies in Pancha karma. Vamana is considered to be the effective treatment for both Pitta and Kapha excess. Also it is used for Vata treatment occasionally.⁽¹⁴⁾ Teachers and associate professors / Gujarat University in India confirmed in their clinical study that Vasantika Vamasa (therapeutic emesis in spring season) can be used for preventive therapy for disease of Kapha origin such as psoriasis, eczema etc. On the report of their clinical study, patients were given Vamana yoga (medicated formula with Madanaphala pipali -4 parts, Vacha-2 parts, Saindhava Lavana -1part),honey-1 part) for five days in average followed by Pashtakarma(Post-operative care). After the procedure, It is noted that there is significant improvement in their symptoms and condition.⁽¹⁵⁾

Virechana

It is also known as Purgative therapy. It is mainly second of the five therapy of pancha karma. Wastes eliminated through the lower pathway of the body. Virechana is used for Pitta disorder to cleanse the primary site of pitta where is in the stomach and small intestine. Assistant professor Mandip and Professor Harimohan revealed by their research that oral administration of Guduchi-Bhringaraja Rasayana and Shrishadi decoction, and Shujyadi Lepa local application after Virechana Karma increased cure rate nearly 80 % in patients of Vicharchika significantly. Also, 91.7 % of no recurrence rate was reported. Treatment was given for 60 days. According to the research, each dosha improved remarkably. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Basti :

Also called Enema therapy. The therapy purifies the colon where the primary location of Vata, and nourish the body. It is said that Vata is responsible for 60 % of all diseases, 80% of diseases may be cured by enema therapy. ⁽¹⁴⁾

“V is life, strength, and sustainer of all creatures. V is the entire world, it is the master of all.”The person whose V is with unimpeded movements and in the normal state lives long for 100 years devoid of disorders.”

Charaka Samhita⁽¹⁷⁾

Rakta Mokshana :

It is known as bloodletting. Leeches are often used for treatment in India. Leeches draw vitiated blood; therefore, it helps to create new blood. According to a classical textbook, Rakta vitiation causes skin disease. Also, it is said that Rakta moksha is one of the optimal treatment for Kustha. There is a clinical research obtained by K.M. Pratap, S.Dattatreya, and others. According to this study, Leeches were applied to the group of 27 patients who is suffering classical symptoms of Vicarchika. After minimum four setting of leech application with seven days interval, Patient experiences relief of symptoms significantly such as erythema, edema, oozing, excoriation, etc. Also, relief of symptom provided a better quality of life these patients. ⁽¹⁸⁾

“The medicines applied externally exhibit quick effect after the impurity of

blood is eliminated and thus the seat of morbidity is evacuated” Charaka Samhita ⁽¹⁹⁾

In addition, Another study obtained by B.P Shaw and A.K Jain confirmed that external application of Vernia Anthalmintica(known as Iron weed) powder and Nimbadi(known as neem) oil were applied among patients who has eczema, some patient experiences improvement of symptoms. ⁽²⁰⁾

Rasayana therapy :

Rasayana known as Rejuvenation therapy, Rasa=taste and plasma, ayana= “to enter."Rasayana improves tissue nutrition. Dr. Rad states that" If a person is reasonably healthy, he or she can do Rasayana therapy after undertaking cleansing”⁽²¹⁾ According to a recent clinical study by Mandip and H.M Chandola, Pt was given Rasayana after eight days course of bowel cleanse with Aragvadha, then given Shirishadi decoction orally and Snuhyadi lepa externally for treatment of eczema. This combined treatment provides 18.2 % of complete remission. However, the rate increased to 22.6 % when Rasayana was added to eczema treatment ⁽²²⁾

Diet ;

As Charaka mentioned earlier, proper food choice is essential for skin disease. Addition to proper food choice, Susruta addressed “patient with skin disorder should avoid the use of meat, fat, milk, curd, oil, eatables prepared from corn flour, sours, incompatible foods and overeating, uncooked foods or that which cause indigestion, foods which cause burning sensation during digestion and which increase moisture inside the tissue” . ⁽²³⁾ Susurta continues that Ghee intake is an excellent choice for all dosha type of Kustha. ⁽²⁴⁾ Astanga Hridayam, another classical Ayurvedic practitioner wrote taking mediated Ghee is the first treatment for Kustha. ⁽²⁵⁾ Apparently, major traditional Ayurvedic practitioners recommend Ghee intake for the patient who is suffering from eczema.

Conclusion

Nowadays, Eczema is a common disorder in worldwide. Eczema is visible. Consequently, It causes a negative impact on patient psychologically, also influences social life. Both western medicine and Ayurvedic medicine agreed that Eczema is chronic and difficult to cure completely. Modern pharmacology offers treatment for the symptom of eczema. However, it does not provide treatment for the root. Therefore, recurrence is very common. If a patient received treatment with modern

pharmacological medicine, it could mask the symptom. As a result, roots of eczema could be ignored, Eczema became chronic and a later stage in the Ayurvedic system. Ayurveda offers treatment for the root of eczema by cleansing vitiated dosha and balancing the whole body. It brings a balance of body, mind and spirit. Ayurveda believes that All dosha in balance is essential for well-being.

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