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Eczema in children is increasing, but diet is not the cause

Avoiding foods may do more harm than good / Elimination diets can only help children who have food sensitivity

Cologne, Germany: 20 March 2009. The number of children who have eczema has risen – one in five children are now affected by this skin condition, which is often associated with an allergy. Researchers are not yet sure what is causing this growing problem. Many people believe that certain foods are responsible, or at least make the symptoms worse. However, in information published today, the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) stresses that parents should be cautious about eliminating important foods like milk from their baby's or child's diet. Elimination diets probably only help if the child has a proven food sensitivity or allergy. The Institute advises that most babies and small children with mild eczema will grow out of it, and parents will usually not have to change their family's eating habits. Parents can keep up-to-date with the latest research on preventing allergies at the Institute's website, [informedhealthonline.org](http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/informed-health-online.2.en.html) (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/informed-health-online.2.en.html>).

The increase in eczema in children remains a mystery

In the last few decades, the number of people with allergies has been increasing. One of the most common problems is eczema – a skin condition that causes redness and itching. Most of the small children who have mild eczema will grow out of it by the time they are teenagers. But for some, eczema will be a lifelong problem. Researchers still do not know what causes this common condition. However, researchers are making some progress on what can help prevent babies developing eczema and allergies. One of the myths has been dispelled: that diet is usually the culprit.

“Restricting children's diets can harm their health and growth, so parents need to be careful about acting on unproven theories about diet and eczema,” said Professor Sawicki, the Institute's Director. “Trials have shown that eliminating foods like milk or eggs from the diet of small children with eczema probably only helps if they have proven food sensitivities. Formal allergy tests like skin prick and challenge tests done with your doctor can help you get a more reliable picture of whether or not a suspected food really is causing the problem.”

Research knowledge on eczema in babies and children is growing rapidly

Eczema can be made worse by allergens like pollen, as well as irritants like soap or woollen clothing, according to the Institute. “Research knowledge on eczema and allergies is growing quickly, so parents need to make sure that the information they are relying on is based on up-to-date evidence,” commented Professor Sawicki.

For example, researchers are currently looking into the role of probiotics in the development of allergies in children, but the research here is still in the early stages. Parents can reduce their child's risk of allergies by not smoking. The Institute monitors research results to identify new findings on allergy prevention.

The Institute's website, www.informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/informed-health-online.2.en.html>), provides the public with easy-to-understand information about current medical developments and research on important health issues. If you would like to be kept up-to-date with the latest publications on the independent health information website, you can subscribe to the [informedhealthonline.org](http://www.informedhealthonline.org/newsletter.69.en.html) newsletter (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/newsletter.69.en.html>).

Information:

Eczema: Does eliminating particular foods reduce the symptoms? (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.505.en.html>)

Preventing allergies in babies and small children (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/allergy-prevention.137.56.en.html>)

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Glossary

evidence

Evidence is what we call scientific proof from well-conducted, good-quality scientific trials that have been carefully designed to answer specific questions. Depending on the types of questions, different scientific research methods (types of study) are most appropriate to find reliable answers to these questions. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), for example, are the best way to get reliable evidence on the effectiveness of medical treatments (interventions). This type of study, however, is not the best form of evidence for all possible questions, and does not provide the best answers to all kinds of questions, either. Epidemiological studies, for example, are very suitable for establishing well-founded proof for the spreading of a disease in the population.

allergy

An allergy is the body's overly sensitive reaction to a foreign substance. The body produces antibodies just as it would if the substance were a germ, although it is not dangerous to the body. The symptoms of the allergy partly depend on the substance causing it, the allergen. People with allergies often have symptoms like running nose, watery eyes, itching, rashes, stomach and bowel problems or asthma. Typical allergens are pollen, animal hair, proteins in certain food or house dust mite excrement.

Sources

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

Evidence basis of our health information

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at [**www.informedhealthonline.org**](http://www.informedhealthonline.org)

Disclaimer

This information was prepared and published by the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG). It is based on the evidence and other scientific literature available at the time of publication. The information is intended for the use of patients in Germany. It is not intended to for use to diagnose illnesses and the information is not intended to substitute for medical advice.