

## Evening Primrose Oil may Relieve Eczema



### By Dr. Jean-Jacques Dugoua, ND

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a skin disease that affects a number of people. Eczema may begin as early as infancy, but is typically more common in children. Relapses are common in adolescence and adulthood. Eczema can be located on the hands, elbows, scalp and eyelids or almost anywhere on the body. Its' course is usually unpredictable. Studies have shown that subjects with longstanding eczema have an increased risk of developing cataracts in their 20s and 30s.

Eczema is a superficial inflammation of the skin characterized by itchiness, dryness, scaling and sometimes oozing or weeping lesions. People with eczema usually have a family history of eczema or of allergic disorders, such as asthma or seasonal allergies. Anyone with eczema will tell you that the itchiness is constant and unbearable. This leads to scratching and an itch-scratch-itch cycle, thereby worsening the problem. Constant scratching may also lead to bleeding and the risk of infection.

Eczema is usually treated with ointments that stop skin inflammation, such as corticosteroid creams. However, recent research shows that the essential fatty acid gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) may be useful in the treatment of eczema. Evening primrose oil (EPO) contains high amounts of GLA, an omega-6 fatty acid. When taken orally, EPO has been shown to have an anti-inflammatory effect, which is desirable in the treatment of eczema.

A meta-analysis, which is considered one of the highest levels of scientific evidence, was conducted at the Efamol Research Institute in Guildford, U.K on nine controlled trials of EPO and its effect in the treatment of eczema. In the nine controlled trials, subjects diagnosed with eczema either received EPO or a placebo. Doctors and patients assessed the severity of eczema by scoring measures of inflammation, dryness, scaliness, itchiness and overall skin involvement.

After treatment, both patient and doctor assessments showed a highly significant improvement of EPO over placebo. EPO was shown to be strikingly effective with respect to improvement in itchiness. The researchers concluded that EPO is an effective treatment option for eczema.

Another study was conducted at the University of Turku, Finland on the effects of EPO for eczema sufferers. Subjects with eczema were divided into two groups: one group received EPO for 12 weeks and the other received a placebo. The subjects receiving EPO had a statistically significant improvement in the overall severity and grade of inflammation and in the percentage of the body surface involved by eczema as well as in dryness and itch. The patients receiving EPO showed a significantly greater reduction in inflammation than those receiving placebo. Similar to the results of the meta-analysis, the researchers concluded that EPO was an effective treatment for eczema.

Based on these clinical studies, EPO appears to be a good treatment option for eczema sufferers. EPO is well tolerated and has minimal side effects.

**Caution: Do not use EPO if you are pregnant.**