

Atopic Eczema Day - going beneath the skin

Written by Mikaela Odemyr on 3 September 2019 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

Mikaela Odemyr tells us why greater awareness is needed of a skin disease which affects one in five children across Europe.



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Atopic eczema is a neglected chronic inflammatory skin disease that causes the skin to become itchy, dry, cracked, sore and red.

The incessant itching can cause repetitive scratching that can disrupt sleep, make the skin bleed and cause secondary infections.

It affects three percent of adults and 20 percent of children in Europe, of which one in five lives with a severe condition.

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On September 14th, we will celebrate Atopic Eczema Day – a global event to raise awareness and understanding of this allergic skin disease.

Atopic Eczema Day puts a spotlight on this condition and the need for better support and management of the disease.

As underlined in our report, *Itching for life*, the disease causes severe physical, social, mental and economic distress for patients, resulting in a deterioration of their Quality of Life (QoL).

Patients can spend nearly one to the three hours a day treating their diseases, and, to make matters worse, 20 percent of adult atopic eczema patients also have asthma.

Because their sleep is disrupted, sufferers also often have to deal with exhaustion, daytime drowsiness and work performance issues and unsurprisingly, the disease can lead to higher rates of depression.

“Atopic Eczema Day puts a spotlight on this condition and the need for better support and management of the disease”

People with atopic eczema are frustrated and sometimes ostracised by this chronic disease which can interfere with both their work and home life. Children with the disease often face bullying and isolation and have an increased risk of Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD and developing asthma.

Parents and caregivers are adversely affected as well, often feeling frustration, helplessness and even guilt at their child’s condition.

Due to increased personal spending and uncomfortable social experiences, eczema patients face financial burdens that negatively affect their QoL.

The economy also suffers with wages lost from decreased productivity from patients and caregivers.

Seen in the context of chronic non-communicable diseases, atopic eczema seems to play only a marginal role in the considerations of global health bodies and institutions.

Indeed, skin diseases in general are largely neglected in the WHO Global Action Plan 2013-2020, as well as in the subsequent Global Monitoring Framework.

Meanwhile allergic conditions have only recently been identified as a stand-alone section in the International Classification of Diseases.

“We need to look at this disease more deeply because the situation for people living with atopic eczema goes far beneath the surface of their skin”

Furthermore, despite the associated burden and the risk factors involved, there has not yet been an authoritative report on prevalence, management, and QoL aspects of atopic eczema, nor commitment as has been the case with another skin disease, psoriasis.

At EU level, we are joining forces with other healthcare organisations in calling for an EU framework for chronic, non-communicable diseases, including atopic eczema to ensure that such diseases are high on the political agenda.

There is a need for greater recognition of atopic eczema as a serious chronic illness with significant social and emotional impact.

Awareness needs to be supported by greater research funding on risk factors, such as food, stress and air pollution.

Accordingly, the focus should be on citizen-centred information when it comes to chemicals and persistent fragrances used in clothing, personal hygiene and cleaning products.

We need to look at this disease more deeply because the situation for people living with atopic eczema goes far beneath the surface of their skin.

Atopic Eczema Day brings together those affected by the disease and encourages them to share their experiences.

For more information about EFA, visit: <http://www.efanet.org/campaigns/atopical> [6]

About the author



Mikaela Odemyr is the 2nd Vice Chair of the Swedish Asthma and Allergy Foundation since 2013. She started in the patient movement at the local member association in Örnköldsvik, and is their Secretary, Ombudsman and representative of the north region of Sweden. She is an EFA patient expert for the European Medicines Agency and an IMI patient adviser.

For the past 12 years, Mikaela has lectured in schools, as well as for various authorities and parents

living with allergy and asthma. This is based on her experience and learning as a mother of children with severe asthma and allergy and involves changes to welcoming patients and improving care and the environment. In 2015, she was elected to the EFA Board and after one year as a board member was elected as President.

She is EFA representative at the European Academy of Allergology and Immunology EAACI Patient Organisation Committee and the European Respiratory Society ERS Lung Foundation Patient Advisory Board, and a member of EAACI Ethics Committee. Like EFA founder Kerstin Hejdenberg, Mikaela is committed to allergies, children and research, and also to the broad breath of respiratory diseases, in particular COPD.

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