

Eczema and the Medical Herbalist's Perspective

Since I was a little girl, I have used herbs, fruits, vegetables, seeds and the gifts that mother nature had to offer.

I was trained since very young by the indigenous people I grew up with, and my mother's teachings to resource and be an alchemist, is a passion and my way of life.

When I connected with Tami my gut feeling immediately told me that she was the ideal match for us and after communicating with her my feelings were confirmed. She is a nature being that knows her work very well and I wish to introduce you to her and her gifts, with much gratitude for the opportunity to do so.

Isabel Harkins

[Tami Bronstein, BSc Phyt \(Hons\), MNIMH, AHG](#)



**Just Scratching the Surface:
Eczema and the Medical Herbalist's
Perspective**

**By Tami Bronstein, BSc Phyt (Hons),
MNIMH, AHG**

Relief;

something we desperately seek when suffering. Skin, as the largest

organ of the body, can be an all-consuming suffering when Eczema is in the

picture. As adults, we learn to distract ourselves from discomforts to some

degree; children don't understand, they simply succumb to the overwhelming and all-consuming frustration of not feeling well.

That said, regardless of age, Eczema is deeply troubling for anyone who

experiences it.

At its worst, Eczema causes skin to chronically inflame, weep, crack and

bleed to the point of secondary widespread bacterial and fungal infection.

The skin is our barrier to resist opportunistic infective microbes of our

environment, and its integrity is compromised when chronically inflamed.

It goes deep.

Why the vicious cycle? Why won't topical preparations work long-term?

The answer is deep. The answers are internal. The answers are complex

and unique to the Individual, and not simply solved with remedies found on

health food store/pharmacy shelves or in a conventional prescription tube.

These conventional topical preparations often contain petrochemical

ingredients, toxic preservatives, and related to a litany of potential and

common side-effects –of which cancer is included.

Plant-based crèmes and homeopathic preparations may ease the flare-ups

temporarily, but patches of Eczema stubbornly linger or return in shortorder.



So, what are we to do?

Certainly as we can observe, topical remedies ease and soothe the

symptoms of this condition, but they fall-short of getting to the causative

factors.

When I see an Individual for Eczema, I like to establish a foundation in

understanding the skin as an organ of the body and its basic physiology

(its functioning), on its own and as a part of the entire body. From the

basic concepts, I find it useful to explain the various factors that can

contribute to the condition.

The first take-away: Skin conditions such as Eczema are a symptom of

something more systemic, rather than simply a superficial dysfunction of

the skin itself.

That is to say, it indicates some other internal disruption that the skin is

reflecting, reacting or responding to. So, you can repeatedly apply any

crème or ointment you wish to manage the inflammation, itchiness, and

other unpleasant symptoms, but it will return until you

address what is

going on at a deeper level of the brain and body.

The Organism and Neuro-Endocrine connection

Even if it seems like a foreign language and impossible for the Individual to

remember the details, I find that a general sense of the bigger picture

empowers a person with insight and more efficient management of

recurring flare-ups, should they occur along the way.

First we begin by seeing skin as a functioning organ, our physical barrier to

the external world, and one of the largest channels of waste elimination. It

is amongst other waste-management organ systems including:

- digestive (bowels)
- respiratory (lungs and sinuses)
- urinary (kidneys)
- lymphatic
- skin

Skin acts to help regulate body temperature, excrete waste products of

metabolism/environmental exposure, and functions as a metabolically active

envelope to contain/protect muscles, bones, organs and

connective

tissues within our bodies as a functionally-integrated organism.

To help Individuals understand the role of skin as part of the integrated

picture, it is important to discuss the core collaboration between physical

function (physiology) and its nuances that regulate the entire body. We

look to the ultimate brain-body connection:

- Central Nervous system (brain) and
- Endocrine system (hormones/neurotransmitters)

This core collaboration coordinates the function of every cell in the body,

and fluctuates in response to being at-rest versus responding to the

demands of life. There is a feedback loop of information returning from the

body to the Central Nervous system to complete the circuit between brain

and body.

Let's touch upon a few key realms we must explore in getting to the cause

of the Eczema in order to resolve the condition, keep the tendency at-bay

and/or manage what does surface.

Channel an inner Sherlock Holmes

Okay, I will admit to a personal fascination with the current television

series on Masterpiece Mystery of "Sherlock", featuring Benedict

Cumberbatch. I also enjoyed the series "House, MD", featuring Hugh Laurie

(which mirrored the Sherlock Holmes storyline, in its own clever way).

Getting to the cause of a dysfunction requires quite a bit of medical

detective work, and perhaps why these shows are compelling to me. This is

what makes my work uncommon, methinks; the conventional world dwells

upon symptoms, separating care of organ systems rather than seeing their

integration, and limiting insight to the bubbling source of the recurring

condition. Just like Sherlock, it is my job to be the detective and examine

every subtle (some seemingly insignificant) nuance that leads to the

Nemesis.

If any two individuals who suffer from Eczema were to stand side-by-side,

the causative picture for each is different. Each Individual's

experiences

are the result of a unique mosaic -a woven tapestry- of factors discovered

when I am exploring a thorough medical history. Some exploration delves

back into their history by decades!

I thought to review a few of these clues that I sleuth in solving an

individual's unique mystery.

This is evident as -if you have tried everything your friends, family, online

blogs or health food store clerks have recommended to no avail- I have

seen results.

The Nemesis is typically a composite of factors, rather than one source. So,

let's have a look at a few common areas that I must explore when

managing Eczema in an individual:

The Clues

- Environmental Allergies : Airborne mold spores and general seasonal allergies are a common trigger alongside other factors of

allergic eczema, and individuals often benefit from air

filtration in

the home. Air filters on the central heating/air-conditioning units

can be found with HEPA qualification down to 3 microns, and must

be changed regularly, every few months. Additional stand-alone air

purifiers can be of use, as well. Frequent saline nasal flushing can

reduce allergens that affect mucous membranes of respiratory

system via allergic reaction, which compromises one of the 5 major

channels of elimination (lungs/sinus) and triggers skin dysfunction.

- Food Allergies and Leaky Gut Syndrome : Food allergies often compromise lower bowel function; As one of the 5 major channels of

waste elimination having reduced efficiency, skin can react to bowel

inflammation and disruption.

Have your physician test for the major food allergy culprits, such as:

gluten, dairy, wheat, soy/legumes, citrus, shellfish, nuts, MSG

derivatives, etc (to begin with). Allergy testing can get fairly

overzealous at times with some practitioners, overwhelming an

Individual with limitations. Starting just with the most common

allergens reveals enough to make a difference and get a handle on

primary irritants. The best approach: eliminate the primary

irritating food allergens indicated via testing and vary daily food

choices, as much as possible; Eating the same foods day after day

can be problematic over time.

Leaky Gut Syndrome is often a result of chronic bowel inflammation

from concerns such as food sensitivities, repeated antibiotic use and

yeast overgrowth; once the bowel membrane lining is inflamed and

weepy, large protein molecules cross bowel walls into the

bloodstream, tipping-off a hyper-immune response. Reviewing bowel

function is a significant review point when I am going over the

medical history.

(NOTE: To those gluten-intolerant, watch nutritional supplements as

the excipients [base ingredients] may contain fillers possibly contaminated with gluten, such as some sources of xanthan gum;

some Individuals react to corn sugars in a similar way to gluten

sensitivity.)

- Chronic Constipation: Chronically sluggish bowel motility can trigger

skin issues as well, because the bowels can re-absorb toxins back

into the system while bowel movements await evacuation. This can

be most commonly due to poor dietary habits, lack of activity, antibiotic use, Candida (yeast) overgrowth, excessive dairy intake,

unmanaged stress, and dehydration. Repopulating the bowels with a

refrigerated, enteric-coated Probiotic is helpful, even with a significant gap of time since taking the antibiotics.

Candida (yeast) overgrowth from repeated use of antibiotics and

diets high in sugars can be a relatively silent contributor to the

picture, and must be considered.

[Note: non-organic foods contain pesticides like glyphosate, which

can disrupt the natural bacterial flora of the lower bowels,

contributing to digestive disorders; probiotics are useful in diets high

in non-organic foods]

- Chemicals and Heat : Unlike simple Contact Dermatitis reactivity to

irritating chemicals in laundry or body care detergents, many typically benign body care ingredients that are synthetic can be

activated to irritate by the addition of heat and friction (exerciserelated

or in warmer seasons). Eczema tends to flare in skin folds

when the body heats up, so using commercial products with

synthetic ingredients and fragrances can set-up a perfect

environment for an extraordinarily troubling flare-up where the

body's heat is concentrated. This includes the scalp, inside/behind

ears, eye folds, inside elbows, backs of knees, and underarms.

Carefully selected plant-based, chemical-free & hypoallergenic hair,

skin and body products keep potential irritants out of the picture.

Rule of thumb: Keep product use simple.

- Acid/Alkaline balance: Diets high in acidic or acid-forming foods

favors general inflammation in the body, which feeds inflammatory

skin conditions. I advise keeping a more neutral diet by

increasing

alkaline foods, reducing all sugars (including fruit sugars), minimizing dairy, reducing animal meats, avoiding processed meats

(such as smoked or cured) and eating more vegetables, whole grains

and raw or dry roasted nuts/seeds (as tolerated). Proper hydration

supports acid/alkaline balance, improves bowel function, and sustains skin moisture.

- Chronic inflammation: By-products of inflammation add to general

metabolic wastes that the lymphatic system must work to drain for

excretion out of the body. Extended, repeated periods of

inflammation place an ongoing load on the lymph glands to drain the

tissues bogged-down with waste products, and must be supported in

expediting the healing of Eczema flare-ups.

The lymphatic system is not only part of waste removal, but also a

primary immune system contributor. Lymph glands produce

immune cells to fight infection, and when inflammation of the skin

compromises its integrity as a barrier to germs, lymph glands

activate to mount an immune response toward invading viruses, bacterium and fungus. Chronic environmental and food allergies are

in-fact excessive or hyper-immune responses to allergens, and so

demands on the lymphatic system are consistently elevated during

Eczema flare-up. Immune support becomes a focus, but rather than

stimulating an already over-stimulated immune system, we look to

modulate immune activity. This is a largely misunderstood but

critical variation between stimulating and modulating immune

functions when working with chronic or autoimmune conditions.

- Adrenal fatigue : Chronic stress, lack of restful sleep, excessive

scheduling of activities, corticosteroid use, excessive sugar/caffeine

intake, and additional factors play-into adrenal gland depletion. A

constant state of “fight or flight” and excessive activity drains the

adrenals of its hormonal output. This affects all inflammatory conditions, as adrenal cortisol manages inflammation.

When we consistently withdraw from the resource “bank” of the adrenals without putting those funds “back in the bank”, we

are

unable to properly respond to new stresses and demands for activity.

It is important that children are not over-scheduled with physical

activities such as sports, and to watch sugar & caffeine intake as all

of these deplete tiny bodies with already-rapid metabolisms.

- Anxiety : Anxiety contributes as an ongoing source of adrenal

depletion via increased demand for “fight or flight” output.

Sometimes an individual can experience more anxiety when

adrenals are depleted; Equally, anxiety can exist and be a primary

source of adrenal fatigue.

Ideally, we sort the cause and manage situations as they happen;

however, those with generalized anxiety disorders may require

some minor ongoing support, to avoid affecting endocrine balance or

managing endocrine balance to avoid worsening anxiety.

With any mood disorder, we must seek to reduce chemical load of

food flavor enhancers (such as monosodium glutamate and its

derivatives), chemicals, preservatives, synthetic fillers,

coloring,

artificial flavorings, neuro-excitotoxins as aspartame (Nutrasweet)

and pancreatic disruptors such as corn syrup.

Anxiety must be managed, as it alters pH (acid levels increase) in

the digestive system, favoring inflammation and constipation;

Irritated, frazzled nerves as a result of Chronic Anxiety on quality of

sleep feeds Eczema flare-ups.

- Puberty and Menopause: Permanent hormonal transitions at certain stages of life can trigger Eczema, as the Neuro-Endocrine balance is challenged to find a new norm. We can work to minimize the effects of these transitions.

The detective deduces...

I see many people who fill their cupboards with various pricey supplements that are randomly or partially used. It is an experimentation process much like throwing spaghetti against a wall and seeing which noodles stick. There is a more direct and

methodical road to recovery. While it may take a bit more time than

popping a corticosteroid pill, with attention to subtle

influences,

Individual compliance, consistency of dosage and reformulation of

herbal medicines as the body evolves, we can use whole plants to

give the body what it needs to normalize itself.

The role of the Medical Herbalist is to explore all subtle and overt

influences of the condition, taking great time and care to listen and

mind even the smallest details that truly do matter to healing and

recovery. Following a full medical history review, herbal medicine

formulations (fluid extracts, syrups, teas, powders) are typically

compounded by-hand (although some practitioners do send the

formula out to a compounding dispensary elsewhere), and follow-ups

are booked to monitor progress. Changes in the formula(s) are made

as the body evolves along the way until resolution. Some individuals

require ongoing support depending upon medical history details, but

ultimately we seek the cause to resolve symptoms.

Meanwhile, if you have found some plant-based topical

preparations

that give you temporary soothing relief, keep up with it.
Internal

therapy with Herbal Medicines take some time, as we work
together

to peel back the layers of contributing factors; it is helpful
to know

there is something on-hand to soothe the steadily retreating
symptoms as we go.

I enjoy donning my proverbial Sherlock Holmes hat and getting
to

the bottom of solving a well-care mystery.

Tami Bronstein is a Medical Herbalist, qualified in East
Sussex and

London, England (UK). Her ongoing post-graduate work with
doctors

from Paris, France focuses on plant remediation following the
evaluation of neuro-endocrine (hormonal) sources of disease
and

imbalance, known as Endobiogenic Medicine. She consults

individuals cross-country privately by phone and in-person
from her

organic dispensary in Highland Park, NJ. Tami can be reached
at

908.915.1998 and tami@sundancewellness.com with more

information at: www.sundancewellness.com