

Lifestyle & Culture

Natural remedies for eczema: A comprehensive guide



PROF. RENALD BLUNDELL

Eczema, a chronic skin condition characterised by red, itchy and inflamed skin, affects millions of individuals worldwide. While modern medicine offers a range of treatments, many people are turning to natural remedies for relief. These remedies, often rooted in traditional practices, aim to soothe symptoms and support overall skin health without the side effects associated with some pharmaceuticals. This article delves into the causes of eczema, explores various natural treatments, and provides insights from experts and sufferers alike.

Understanding eczema

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a condition where patches of skin become inflamed, itchy, red, cracked and rough. Blisters might sometimes occur. Although the exact cause of eczema is unknown, it is believed to result from a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Common triggers include stress, allergens, irritants like soaps and detergents, and changes in weather.

The appeal of natural remedies

Natural remedies for eczema are gaining popularity due to their potential to alleviate symptoms with fewer side effects. Many individuals prefer to use products derived from nature to avoid the chemicals often found in conventional treatments. Additionally, natural remedies can often be made at home, making them an accessible and cost-effective option.

Popular natural remedies

Coconut Oil: Coconut oil is celebrated for its moisturizing properties, making it a popular choice for eczema sufferers. It contains lauric acid, which can help reduce bacteria, fungi and viruses on the skin. Applying virgin coconut oil directly to the skin can help keep it moist and reduce inflammation.

Aloe Vera: Aloe vera, a plant known for its soothing properties, has been used for centuries to treat various skin conditions. It can help reduce redness, itchiness and the potential for infection. Aloe vera gel, taken



Photo: AI-generated image created by Prof. Blundell

directly from the plant or purchased in pure form, can be applied to the affected areas for relief.

Oatmeal baths: Colloidal oatmeal, finely ground oats suspended in water, can be added to baths to relieve itching and soothe irritated skin. Oatmeal has anti-inflammatory properties and forms a protective barrier on the skin, which helps lock in moisture.

Apple cider vinegar: Apple cider vinegar is known for its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. Diluting apple cider vinegar with water and applying it to the skin can help balance the skin's acidity levels and combat bacteria. However, it's essential to use it with caution, as undiluted vinegar can cause burns.

Honey: Honey has been used for its healing properties since ancient times. Its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties make it beneficial for treating wounds and infections. Applying a layer of medical-grade honey to the skin can help accelerate healing and reduce inflammation.

Shea butter: Shea butter, de-

rived from the nuts of the shea tree, is rich in vitamins and fatty acids that nourish and moisturize the skin. Its anti-inflammatory properties can help soothe the eczema flare-ups, while its emollient qualities keep the skin hydrated.

Calendula cream: Calendula, also known as marigold, has been traditionally used to treat skin inflammation and irritation. Calendula cream can reduce pain and inflammation while promoting healing. It is particularly useful for sensitive skin due to its gentle nature.

Probiotics: Probiotics, beneficial bacteria that support gut health, are emerging as a potential treatment for eczema. Some studies suggest that improving gut flora can positively impact the skin's immune response, reducing eczema symptoms. Probiotics can be found in foods like yogurt, kefir and supplements.

Tea Tree oil: Tea tree oil, known for its antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties, can be effective in treating eczema. Diluted tea tree oil can be applied to the skin to reduce swelling, itching and infection

risks. However, it's crucial to dilute it properly to avoid irritation.

Evening Primrose oil: Evening primrose oil, rich in omega-6 fatty acids, has been shown to reduce inflammation and improve skin hydration. It can be taken as a supplement or applied topically to relieve eczema symptoms.

Precautions and considerations

While natural remedies offer potential benefits, it's essential to approach them with caution. Not all natural treatments are suitable for everyone, and some can cause allergic reactions or interact with other medications. It's advisable to perform a patch test before applying any new substance to a large area of skin.

Consulting with a healthcare provider before starting any new treatment is also recommended, especially for individuals with severe eczema or those currently under medical treatment. Working with a healthcare professional can ensure a balanced and effective approach to managing eczema.

"Natural remedies provide a promising avenue for eczema sufferers seeking relief beyond conventional treatments. From the moisturizing benefits of coconut oil to the soothing properties of oatmeal baths, these treatments offer a variety of options for managing symptoms and improving skin health."

Conclusion

Natural remedies provide a promising avenue for eczema sufferers seeking relief beyond conventional treatments. From the moisturizing benefits of coconut oil to the soothing properties of oatmeal baths, these treatments offer a variety of options for managing symptoms and improving skin health. However, it's crucial to approach these remedies with informed caution and, when in doubt, seek professional guidance. As research continues to unveil the benefits of natural treatments, individuals with eczema have more tools at their disposal to live comfortably and confidently.

Final thoughts

Living with eczema can be challenging, but exploring natural remedies offers hope and relief for many. By combining these treatments with a healthy lifestyle and proper medical advice, eczema sufferers can take significant strides toward managing their condition and improving their quality of life. Whether through the gentle application of aloe vera or the dietary inclusion of probiotics, nature's bounty provides a rich arsenal against the trials of eczema.

Renald Blundell is a biochemist and biotechnologist with a special interest in Natural and Alternative Medicine. He is a professor at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, University of Malta.