

## Adult Dilemmas in Managing Eczema

Many people discount eczema as a minor irritation or inconvenience. They do not fully appreciate the extent to which it can affect a person's normal functioning. In addition to the physical appearance and discomfort of it, the red, itchy, dry and inflamed skin also exacts a psychological toll on the lives of its sufferers.

In 2004 the National Eczema

Society in conjunction with a series of global patient support groups backed a study that was the biggest and most comprehensive study of its kind ever conducted anywhere in the world. The study, called ISOLATE which stood for International Study Of Life with ATopic Eczema, examined the emotional and psychological cost of living with the most widespread type of eczema, atopic eczema. Two thousand individuals participated in the study hailing from eight different countries, including Spain, France, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Mexico, the United States, and the UK. They chose a cross-section of people, some suffering from moderate eczema, all the way up to those who suffered with the most severe cases of eczema.

The

study showed that twenty-five percent of the people interviewed had endured teasing or bullying by others because of their skin condition. For a number of people whose eczema began in childhood and improved only slightly as they aged, their problems continued into adulthood. Many people interviewed for the study believed their skin condition was a "curse" that had charted the course of their lives and wrought havoc at every bend in the road. For example, many people described workplace-related problems wherein they endured cruel comments, constant stares and a lack of knowledge about the disorder. Many of their co-workers mistakenly believed that by touching a surface, such as a chair or desk, that the eczema patient had touched, they could contract the disease.

Besides the blatant workplace discrimination, one in seven

patients interviewed strongly believed that their skin condition thwarted their careers. Many cited problems surviving job interviews, as well as feeling that their choice of careers was limited, not because of lack of experience, knowledge, or education but because of their skin condition.

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eczema patient's can also suffer in their personal life. Many sufferers reported that dating and in some cases the decision to remain single was related to their skin disorder. One in four people interviewed strongly believed that finding a mate was made difficult because of their skin condition and forty-three percent admitted to feeling insecure and awkward in intimate situations, especially when suffering the worst flare-ups. Many eczema patients suffer from a case of low self-esteem, and have constant bouts of depression, as well as embarrassment and frustration at their life situation because of their skin condition. Many people suffering from this skin condition feel many areas of their lives are impacted. While it may be a physical problem, it easily becomes a psychological quandry. The ISOLATE survey found that three out of four eczema patients interviewed admitted that, "Being able to control their eczema effectively would be the single most important improvement to their quality of life."