A Live Bacteria Treatment May Benefit Kids With Eczema

Bacteria already found on the skin improved eczema symptoms in children.

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Eczema frequently appears in kids before age 5, but the noncontagious, inflammatory skin condition also affects adults, causing painful, itchy, scaly rashes that disrupt sleep. But recent findings published in the journal Science Translational Medicine show that live bacteria already present on the skin might result in a safe and effective new treatment for children with the condition, reports NIH Research Matters, a health information newsletter of the National Institutes of Health.

The causes of eczema aren't known, but research has suggested that bacteria and other microorganisms living on the skin are involved in the development of the condition. What's more, previous studies have shown that the balance of bacteria differs in individuals with eczema compared with those who don't have the disease.

For the investigation, researchers added 15 children—some as young as 3—to the five already registered in a previous clinical trial to see whether a bacteria found on healthy skin might help relieve eczema. During a four-month period, scientists had the kids or adults who supervised them apply a solution (twice each week for three months and every other day for an extra month) containing the bacterium *Roseomonas mucosa* on areas of their skin affected by eczema.

Then, scientists slowly upped the dosages of *R. mucosa* for most of the kids in the study.

Researchers found that after treatment, eczema symptoms for 17 of the 20 youngsters improved by more than 50%. In addition, researchers noted that the ability of the children's skin to seal in moisture and bar allergens increased; most required less corticosteroids for their condition, felt less itching and experienced an enhanced quality of life.

"Most children in the study experienced substantial improvements in their skin and overall well-being following *R. mucosa* therapy," said Ian Myles, MD, MPH, of the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who led the study. "Encouragingly, the therapeutic bacteria stayed on the skin and continued to provide benefit after therapy stopped."

Myles said the findings support a bigger study that's underway to further evaluate the safety and

effectiveness of this experimental treatment.

For related coverage on eczema and skin health, read the “Developmental Origins of Eczema and Psoriasis Discovered” and “Many Dermatologists Lack Medical Expertise in Treating Black People."

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