



Episode 8: Pure Skin with Cheryl Talent

Pure Skin

Discussing Eczema in babies.

Tiffany: Hi everyone. We have another exciting topic to share with you today. We will be discussing the prevention and treatment of eczema in babies.

This topic is especially close to home as eczema in babies is one of the reasons Purebaby was created back in 2002 by its founder, Mirabai Winford. Mirabai was unable to find quality organic garments for her first child, Samara, so she decided to create her own baby clothing, which is how Purebaby came to be!

Today we are joined by Cheryl from The Eczema Association. Thanks, so much for joining us today. How long have you been working with The Eczema Association?

Cheryl: Hi everyone. My name is Cheryl Talent and I'm President of The Eczema Association and an eczema sufferer myself. I have worked with The Eczema Association for over 20 years now. I started as a volunteer when my eczema flared up very severely in my 30s due to some dramatic changes in my life, which is fairly typical. I was covered in eczema as a baby. So much so that my mother would not take me out of the house as she was so embarrassed!

Tiffany: Wow, Cheryl. That was so great to hear a bit more about your past and your work within The Eczema Association. Cheryl, what is your role with helping parents understand more about eczema in babies?

Cheryl: Well, Tiffany, we talk to many pregnant women and new mothers and we really try to educate them in preparation for if and when their baby may develop eczema. How we can try to prevent it and how best to treat it if it does happen.

Of course, there's still no cure for eczema which is, you know, really disheartening for people. But for most people, we know that good management is achievable and that includes babies and toddlers.

Tiffany: Yeah that's great to know and I think really important to really highlight that for people. So, if a woman has eczema, how can she manage it during pregnancy?

Tiffany: (cont...) I think that's one of the key things we're talking about today is supporting mothers during that journey for themselves and then obviously helping understand a bit more in babies too, but with the pregnancy management, I think that might be a really good place to start today.

Cheryl: Well, we know that once you get pregnant and if you are already an eczema sufferer, those hormonal changes can cause eczema to either flare up dramatically and really be a problem or go away completely. There seems to be sort of no in between. So, the main thing to take away is that you can still use your normal treatments.

A lot of pregnant women contact me because they're under the misconception, often fostered by their GPs, and we know that GP's have to know a lot of stuff and don't know everything, but you know they're really worried about using their topical steroid treatments which really helps them manage their skin more effectively. It's quite OK to use those treatments. It's always good to have a talk to your doctor or specialist, but maintaining your normal eczema management plan, even when you're pregnant.

Have a very healthy diet. Don't go overboard on what we call 'heating foods' such as dairy, eggs, citrus and that type of thing, fish. Eat everything in moderation according to what is the recommendations for eating when you're pregnant. Also, reducing stress. Eczema itself causes stress, so we need to find things that really help us to manage that stress and then that helps manage your skin more effectively.

Tiffany: Yeah that makes a lot of sense actually and I think that plays out in so many health issues, but it's really great to know that that's one of the key factors there with eczema as well. How likely is their baby then to develop eczema?

Cheryl: Well unfortunately, we still don't know precisely what causes eczema, but there are a lot of things we can look at. Of course, there's no cure yet, so that's very disheartening, as I said before.

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Cheryl: Genetic predisposition can definitely be a factor. So, if you have one parent with eczema, you have an up to 50% chance of the baby developing eczema. For those people that there's two partners or two parents with eczema, it can be as high as 80% chance for their baby developing eczema.

We also know that environment and other factors can play a role. We're all becoming a bit more sensitive to our environment. There are more toxins in the air and water, and we eat more preservatives. Looking at all those factors can really play a role in whether your baby will develop eczema, and often it's just a wait and see.

Tiffany: That's really good to know all of those key elements there to understand a bit more about that. Obviously, if you suffer from eczema yourself you may have looked into things a bit more, but you may not necessarily know how that's going to then affect your offspring or your children moving forward into the future.

So, how can parents help prevent their baby from developing eczema? Is there any way that they can potentially prevent it?

Cheryl: Look, at this stage there's no test you can really have and there's no definitive way you can prevent it, but there are some things we can do that can help.

It is really concerning when you have eczema. You really worry about your child going through the same journey that you may have had a lot of difficulty with, so, we just have to look at the fact that it's possible the baby will develop eczema and if they don't well you're really lucky.

If you have a family predisposition there's a lot of evidence showing that taking a daily probiotic can really reduce that risk. There is a special strain of probiotic, so talking to your pharmacist and getting some advice on probiotics and especially one for eczema is a really good idea.

Tiffany: That's great. It's good to know that there are some things you can take that can really help reduce those risks. That's so great. So, Cheryl, what typically triggers eczema in babies do you find?

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Cheryl: Well, there's no scientific evidence. We know that often babies are born with inbuilt protection from their mum, which lasts around about that two-month period. And then they are more susceptible to environmental triggers and babies don't really suffer any stress like adults, which is a trigger for eczema.

But for some babies, teething can be a trigger. It can really upset the system. Their drool and their urine get very acidic and in affect, can actually burn the skin and start off that eczema process on their skin. It can be quite difficult to control while they're drooling.

Changing to formula for some babies can be a trigger. They are a bit more sensitive and we do sort of recommend that if you have a problem with the formula, talk to your doctor and they may need to go on a sensitive one.

Also, scale back introducing solids. We're not saying don't introduce them at a normal rate, but just one at a time, and if you do notice that they're having a bit of a reaction, take it away and introduce it in like a few weeks. And also, that one at a time is very important so you get a bit of an idea of how they're reacting to foods. It's often not the food itself, it's the fact that it mixes with the drool on their skin and that causes a bit of a reaction. I know that sounds really weird, but that's often the way it goes.

Tiffaney: Yeah, that's interesting actually.

Cheryl: Yeah. And detecting the triggers is a great way of helping to manage it. So we know with the drool, for example, using a barrier cream would be a good way to help avoid that interaction with the food.

Tiffaney: Yeah. So, the types of barrier creams that you would recommend would vary obviously, depending on the child and obviously they'd need to get pharmaceutical support with that I'm assuming?

Cheryl: So, it's often better to use your favourite cream on your child's face that you know suits them, rather than a really thick ointment, which for some eczema sufferers can really irritate the skin because it heats it up. So, they end up scratching it or rubbing it off and it's not really doing its job.

Cheryl: (cont...) Also, we do recommend that you not use wipes on your child. Use a cotton face washer with a little bit of soap-free wash because we're just trying to reduce that reaction with chemicals, which can make the problem even worse.

Tiffany: I think that's really good advice there because again, it's tempting just to use something easy like a wipe or something so that's great advice. What are some other ways parents can help manage their baby's eczema?

Cheryl: I think it's really important firstly to obtain a proper diagnosis from your GP or dermatologists about what the problem is. It's often been misdiagnosed in the past and if it's diagnosed as for example, a fungal infection, the treatment will make it far worse.

Don't be afraid to use any prescribed treatments, such as a topical steroid cream. We do know that the way we used them these days is quite safe, so don't let your mum, or your partner, or your sister tell you it's dangerous. Using them in short term bursts like we do these days, we get really good management to help treat our eczema.

Other people's suggestions can be really detrimental. Don't be embarrassed by their comments which can be really upsetting. Just be matter of fact and say 'my baby has a skin condition. I'm managing it and it doesn't detract from being a beautiful and gorgeous baby'. If you get too stressed, unfortunately this can often flow through to the baby and make the condition worse. So, you staying calm is really helpful.

Always use skin sensitive or hypoallergenic products. We know they have the safest preservatives and are a much better choice. It's just very much trial and error. What suits one person won't suit another.

Tiffany: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense too and I think being aware of, like you mentioned just earlier, about the stress that you might have passing on to the baby or them picking up on that stress I think is a really important thing to mention.



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Tiffany: (cont...) I'm really glad that you brought that one up because that seems to be something that has been talked about a lot in each of these episodes, so it's been it's great to hear a bit more about that aspect too and be mindful of how you are yourself. Like you said, it does very much translate through the baby, the baby can pick up on all those things, can't they?

Cheryl: Oh, absolutely, you're right. We talk to new mums every day and unfortunately, that's one of the worst things for them. They suffer so much stress because they have this gorgeous little baby who's unfortunately covered in an unsightly rash, but you know you often find these babies are still quite happy babies and I often say to new mums, if your baby hasn't been hospitalised with its skin condition, you're doing a great job managing it - we just need to do a few more things.

Tiffany: Yeah and I think that's really great too just to give that reassurance. That's what every first-time parent wants to know, or any parent, whether you're a first-time parent or not. Just speaking from a parent's perspective, being reassured and letting that mother or father or carer know that they're doing a good job and that they're doing the best they can. I think that's so empowering so that's great that you guys provide that support and that's at the top of your mind when you're dealing with parents. I think that's so great.

So, are there some other things you could recommend that parents do? Such as, choosing to use natural fibres when dressing your baby or choosing their bedding, things like that. I know that's something that we provide at Purebaby, but are there some other things that you can think of that might be worth mentioning to people?

Cheryl: Well those things are very important. We do think it's very important for babies to you know, be dressed in more natural fibres and in layers, rather than a big one big heavy layer. A few cotton layers are a great idea.

One of the problems is that parents tend to dress babies the way they dress themselves, and they often overdress them, and the babies are too hot. We do know that heat is a factor with eczema, so take some layers off.



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Cheryl: (cont...) It's always good to feel the back of the neck where the neck joins the shoulders and if that feels really hot, the baby's probably too hot and that's not going to help their skin condition.

So, some of the ways that we can help manage the eczema is absolutely testing for allergies. It can be really useful in helping you to find some tools to use and things that you can avoid and that is really helpful in managing flares and helping to prevent flares.

Also, look at your daily routine. Maybe tweaking something can be helpful. We know with eczema it's often not about changing a really big thing, but implementing or changing a few small things, for example moisturising. People don't realise that you can moisturise a lot more frequently and it really helps repair the skin barrier. The most important thing to remember is use a moisturiser that really soothes the baby skin - nothing that stings too much, and always patch test anything new for the first time. Moisturise every nappy change - you can't overdo it. We want to really help that skin layer to repair itself and moisturisation is actually a type of treatment.

Dust mite protective coverings as well are very useful. We know that a lot of people react to dust mite droppings, so the dust mite protective coverings on the bed can really help to avoid that interaction with the droppings. Also, the sleeping environment. Make sure the baby's room is not too hot and they're not in really hot bed covers. We don't say throw away that doona. Have some cotton covers and layer them on and make sure that when the baby goes to bed, lots of lovely moisturiser and they might have had a nice little bath beforehand to wash the allergens off their skin.

Make sure they sleeping environment is conducive to them really getting off to a good night sleep because we know most eczema sufferers do their scratching and rubbing through the night because they get overheated. If you've got normal skin, you get into bed to get all warm and comfy and you go to sleep, but when you have eczema, you get into bed, you get warm and comfy and you get itchy - and this applies to babies. Babies are quite sneaky they rub on their bed coverings, so that's why it's very important to have cotton or bamboo are a good choice.

Cheryl: (cont...) If you're still finding you're having problems and you can't manage the eczema as well as you would like, contact us at The Eczema Association for some help and information. We have lots of resources we can send you, or just be a friendly ear and really empathetic if you're having a bad day. You know, sometimes you just had a bad day, you can't settle the baby and we can give you a few tips on how you can perhaps help that process.

I also tell every new parent too, if your baby hasn't been hospitalised with their eczema, you're doing a great job, but we need to do a little bit more just to make the baby as comfortable as we possibly can. We have to work through the flares, unfortunately we don't know how to get rid of them at this stage, but we can really minimise them and make the baby a lot more comfortable and then that helps you to feel as though you're really getting on top of the problem.

Tiffany: Yeah, I think those bits of advice or are great, and like you said just having someone there to call and talk to who has so much experience in dealing with this will be so reassuring for parents. What you mentioned about the dust mite coverings and the sleeping environment, what are the dust mite coverings? What are they made of and how would you implement those in that sleep environment?

Cheryl: They're absolutely wonderful. You can get mattress and pillow protectors and they have a special, almost like a type of plastic but it's a breathable plastic, they're really amazing and they're washable. You can wash them as often as you need to. You would probably buy a cot mattress protector or bassinet. Babies don't usually have pillows so you'd just get the mattress and then that goes under your sheet, and we just want to prevent that interaction with chemicals and other trigger factors that we know can affect eczema sufferers.

So, as I said, it's not one big huge thing you do but it's little things you do in everyday life that make a big difference. Another great tip is if your baby is having a day where they're really hot, they seem really hot and itchy - pop their moisturiser in the fridge! It's a great way to numb an itchy bit very quickly with that nice cold cream, especially coming up to spring and summer. The weather is getting hotter, so we need a bit of extra help with the heat.



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Tiffaney: Yeah, I was going to say that would be one of those things that would definitely be a challenging time for some parents, particularly if they're new to eczema or haven't experienced it too badly - coming into those warmer months could potentially be tricky time for parents to sort of understand why these things might be triggering their child. They might not necessarily realise that it may just be the heat, so it's good to have a few tips like you said putting a moisturiser in the fridge - I haven't heard that one that's a really good one.

Cheryl: Well actually, at the moment we've got our Spring Skin Tips uploaded on our website so if you head over to our website at www.eczema.org.au, you can have a read about our Spring skin tips and we have lots of tips for just dealing with the environment and other factors at this time of the year, because we know that Spring unfortunately is a key time for many eczema sufferers to experience a flare.

We just need to maybe tweak a few things in our daily life. Don't sit near open windows, where you attract allergens, and same goes for babies. You know, if they've been out and about in the park, that's fine, but give them a little rinse off when you get home and pop on their moisturiser and that really helps their skin to maintain its barrier and to cope better with the onslaught of the allergens they've been exposed to.

Tiffaney: Yeah, that's so great. So, thank you so much for joining us today, Cheryl. We're so lucky to have heard from someone who has had so much experience within this area, I guess, not only your time in your current role at The Eczema Association, but as a person living with eczema yourself and having the opportunity to speak with so many people living with eczema every day.

Cheryl: Thanks so much, Tiffany, for inviting me to speak today. I hope everyone listening has discovered something useful to take away with them and help with their eczema management. Just remember that we're always here to help if you need it and it's great just to learn a few new things that you can take into everyday life and maybe make a few changes that can really help.

Tiffaney: That wraps up episode for today! For more information about eczema you can visit www.eczema.org.au.