

# Eczema in early childhood and psychological problems

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Eczema in early childhood may influence behavior and mental health later in life. This is a key finding of a prospective birth cohort study to which scientists of Helmholtz Zentrum München contributed. In cooperation with colleagues of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU), Technische Universität München (TUM) and Marien-Hospital in Wesel, North Rhine-Westphalia this study followed 5,991 children who were born between 1995 and 1998. The study has been published in the current issue of the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* 125 (2010); 404-410.

Researchers, led by Assistant Professor Jochen Schmitt of Dresden University Hospital, Dr. Christian Apfelbacher (Heidelberg University Hospital) and Dr. Joachim Heinrich of the Institute of Epidemiology of Helmholtz Zentrum München, discovered that children who suffered from eczema during the first two years of life were more likely to demonstrate psychological abnormalities, in particular emotional problems, at age ten years than children of the same age who had not suffered from the disease. "This indicates that eczema can precede and lead to behavioral and [psychological problems](#) in children," Dr. Heinrich explained.

Children whose eczema persisted beyond the first two years of life were more likely to have [mental health](#) problems than children who had eczema only in infancy.

Within the framework of the GINIplus study, scientists tracked the

family history of the children, collected data on their physical health and emotional condition at age 10 years and gathered information on their daily lives. Questions were asked about the course of disease - also in [early childhood](#) - with special focus on diseases such as eczema, asthma, allergic rhinitis, stress tolerance and behavioral abnormalities.

Eczema is a non-infectious skin disease characterized by scaling itchy skin rashes. It is the most common skin disease in children and adolescents. Children who suffer from eczema are known to have an increased predisposition for hay fever and allergic asthma. Eczema symptoms are accompanied by a broad spectrum of secondary symptoms, such as sleep disorders.

"We suspect that it is mainly the secondary symptoms that have a long-term effect on the emotions of the affected [children](#)," Joachim Heinrich said. The authors of the study therefore recommend documenting the occurrence of [eczema](#) as potential risk factor for later psychological problems in the children's medical records, even if the actual primary disease abates and disappears during the course of childhood.

Provided by Helmholtz Zentrum Munchen

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