

Link found between maternal depression and atopic dermatitis in children

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Maternal depression in the postpartum period, and even beyond, is associated with the development of atopic dermatitis (AD) throughout childhood and adolescence, according to a recent study published in the

journal *Dermatitis*.

AD is a chronic, inflammatory skin disease typically characterized by itch, pain, and sleep disturbance. It has also been strongly linked to a number of mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

The study, led by Jonathan Silverberg, MD, Ph.D., MPH, associate professor of dermatology at the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, examined the association of [maternal depression](#) in the [postpartum period](#), and maternal and paternal depression in later childhood with AD in U.S. children and adolescents.

Silverberg conducted the data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, in collaboration with first author Costner McKenzie, a [medical student](#) at Northwestern.

"We know that emotional factors can exacerbate AD flares and influence the course of the disease," said Silverberg, the senior author of the study. "Previous studies have shown that family environment and other environmental factors can have an impact on AD."

The researchers analyzed data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. They found that [postpartum depression](#) was associated with higher odds of AD developing later in childhood, more persistent AD, and increased sleep disturbance among children with AD.

"Our results further suggest that postpartum depression is associated with AD even in older children and adolescents, with more persistent disease and greater sleep disturbance," Silverberg said. "This could potentially suggest more severe AD."

Continued research is needed, according to the researchers, to confirm

the associations found, determine underlying mechanisms, and identify appropriate interventions. The authors of the study suggest that pediatricians should consider screening and early intervention for postpartum depression to identify infants at higher risk for AD.

Children born to mothers with [depression](#) in the [postpartum](#) period and beyond may warrant increased screening for AD and atopic disease, as well as use of gentle skin care and other strategies to mitigate AD.

More information: Costner McKenzie et al, Maternal Depression and Atopic Dermatitis in American Children and Adolescents, *Dermatitis* (2020). [DOI: 10.1097/DER.0000000000000548](https://doi.org/10.1097/DER.0000000000000548)

Provided by George Washington University

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