

Probiotic bacteria don't make eczema better -- and may have side effects

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There is no evidence probiotics can relieve the symptoms of eczema, but there is some evidence that they may occasionally cause infections and gut problems. These findings from The *Cochrane Library* come at a time when use of probiotics to treat eczema is increasing.

Eczema is an itchy skin condition that affects more than 1 in 20 people at some time in their lives and is especially common in children. Its cause is complex and not well understood, but sufferers do have different bacteria in their guts compared to unaffected people. Consequently, some nutritionists have suggested that eating live gut-dwelling bacteria, such as those found in probiotic yoghurts and some infant formulas, could be beneficial.

"Some doctors are recommending probiotics as a cheap treatment for eczema, but having carried out a systematic review we have found no evidence that they work for treating eczema," says lead researcher Robert Boyle of Imperial College, London, UK.

The Cochrane Researchers looked at 12 studies that together involved 781 children diagnosed with eczema. These studies compared severity of the disease in children given live bacteria to severity in those given a placebo. The researchers found that probiotics provided no significant health improvement. Similar bacteria were given across all studies, so the researchers could not rule out the possibility that other strains might be beneficial. Moreover they found that in separate studies 46 patients had been reported to suffer side effects from using probiotics, including

infection and bowel damage.

"There is no evidence that probiotics are a worthwhile treatment for eczema, and they may be harmful for certain groups of people," says Boyle. "However, further studies of new probiotics are needed, because it is possible that different types of probiotics which haven't yet been studied in eczema treatment could be more effective."

Source: Wiley

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