Eczema as a Gut Imbalance

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So that starts with prebiotics. The best way to do that is to eat a varied, seasonal, digestible diet. That's real whole foods that are seasonal. Pretty much all meats, all fruits and vegetables, including fricades, and that means preparing all of that properly and combining them all properly, and then just omitting these just a few eczema-specific things that doesn't go well for people with this specific condition, like vinegar, you know, because it's a yeast product.

And so, it was made from yeast. So things like that. You just keep in mind really high, high histamine foods, fermented foods. Unfortunately, the things are counterintuitive, but they're acclaimed to be the all almighty in gut healing rate, but for this specific place, like fermented foods are just too high in histamine and the same goes for bone broth as well.

Welcome to The Functional Edge. I'm Dr. Julia Ward and this is where science meets real-world strategies for living healthier, sharper, and stronger. From uncovering hidden environmental toxins to unlocking peak performance and mental clarity, we cover it all.

Ready to take control of your health and thrive? Let's dive in. Okay, hello and welcome to the Functional Edge podcast. I am your host, Dr. Julia Ward, medical director and founder of Balance Body Function Medicine.

Today, we're honored to welcome Andra McHugh, founder of Eczema Kids and a dedicated advocate for helping families reverse childhood eczima through natural root cause solutions.

In this episode, Andro will be sharing powerful insights on identifying hidden triggers, restoring the gut skin connection and creating an environment where sensitive inflamed skin can truly heal.

Stay tuned for an engaging conversation that promises to empower and inspire your path to wellness. especially if you're caring for a child with eczema and searching for real sustainable answers.

So welcome. Thank you, Dr. Ward. I'm excited to be here. Awesome. When a parent is staring down relentless exima, sleepless nights, non-stop itching, foods failing left and right, where do you tell them to start and why isn't there more dermatologists that have this advice?

You know, and you know just as well as me, but we're not looking at a skin issue when we look at eczema. We're looking, we are looking a gut imbalance.

Looking at dysbiosis. And it's manifesting on the outside. It's mirroring what's happening on inside. Their poor little gut linings are just broken up and pieced up.

you know, pieced away just as their external skin is. So dermatologists, right, they address the skin. They say, here's some steroids. Bleach baths will help.

Let's kill and suppress this thing. And just, you now, a hope and a prayer and cross your fingers and you'll manage your way out of this. Or, just manage it for the rest of your life.

You know, that was the advice I was given when I brought my kids in. I had two kids suffering from severe, severe eczema six years ago. And that's, That was.

The advice that I received and I just, I left that appointment just doing this isn't it, this is in it for my kid. It's and then we figured it out and by addressing the gut and, and restoring their, their microbiome and.

Andra McHughu2019s Personal Eczema Journey

And, you know, like now I help other people do the same, just mere mortal parents. Yeah. And just to put things in context, do you have four kids? Is that right?

Yeah, I have 4 kids. They're 8, 10, 6, and 3 now. Okay. So maybe you can tell us a little bit more about like what your experience was like when you first got hit with that.

You know, my third daughter was just born with eczema and then simultaneously it was the craziest thing. My two-year-old at the time just came down with Eczima like you would a cold.

It just so quickly, it just started out like a little rash on the inside of her thigh and just got bigger and bigger. Just started overtaking her old body.

And at that time I was working in the dental world. You know, as throughout my pregnancy, especially with my third child, I was exposed to a lot of radiation and a lottery.

So, you know it's a really, unfortunately, deleterious field dentistry of any kind. And so I had that and then all three of my kids had been born via cesarean, Unfortunately, and so, that going for us as well, immunity, scale.

And so, you know, that's where we were. And I just like, just suddenly had two kids with debilitating, like life-altering eczema, nobody was sleeping.

It was a horrible, horrible time. They were just both so miserable in the skin that they were in. scratching and awake all night. And, you know, it's just hadn't been a part of my history or my husband's history, or a family history.

It came on so suddenly, I was taken aback. I just didn't know what to do. As I started just uncovering it more and more, once I realized like, okay, allopathic medicine isn't the way, like this is not a workout.

Yeah. Didn't even go to the dermatologist or the allergist, after I had that initial pediatric appointment for this. As I was reading and covering more and more, it's like, okay, this is the direction that we need to go.

And it just became more apparent, like no matter what, that I'm going to be the person that had to implement these changes, right, to ultimately bring about the change that wanted to see in my children's health.

Yeah. So, you know, I just went on this mission to do that. That's awesome. How long did it take you to kind of figure out what to six months, six month from that, like zero sleep, bleeding head to toe skin to clear for both of them.

And it would have been shorter, you know, had I known, of course, but now you can share this wealth of knowledge with other people, which is a beautiful thing.

So tell us, what are some of the misconceptions about eczema? I mean, we just talked about like the skin issue. Obviously, it is not. We certainly need to do some things to address the scan because we're in the here and now and there's some very unpleasant symptoms that they're dealing with.

So there is a lot you can do there. But I think also that it's that it's food triggered. It's not food trigger. You know, eczema doesn't exist because gluten or because, you know dairy, it is because of the imbalance.

And I also just know that so many people get that advice that we spoke to earlier as well. This is like, there's nothing you can really do to change this.

There absolutely is. I just know without a shadow of a doubt, nobody has to live with this. Nobody was sent here to leave with us. We were made for so much more and nobody should feel uncomfortable in their skin, especially our kiddos.

And you can absolutely not just manage it. You can reverse this condition. That's great. Well, what is the best thing to put on the skin when it's flaring?

Our number one role. here is that everything that you put on the skin has to be edible, you know, not in that it would taste good, but that.

Skin Care and Topical Relief Strategies

You could eat it because you are you're consuming it and it's circulating throughout your body and your liver is is digesting it just the same as anything that eat.

So that's the number one. And we start with an herbal oil. I started making herbal oils. It's, um, a process called Aviyanga. Then a part of the Ayurvedic practice for thousands and thousands of years and people use it, you know, as a preventative practice.

But when you infuse herbs like skin nourishing herbs, like neem and amulaki, things like that, into a nutrient dense oil like jojoba oil, those properties, the anti-inflammatory and the moisturizing properties and then the nutritive properties of those herbs get Infused into the skin like the lipophilic properties fat likes fat and so it just starts to it brings those those properties into The tissues and addresses the scan and creates a barrier for even the water because right when you're dealing with eczema Yeah, unfortunately their their skin barrier isn't doing its job, right?

It's too thin And so the things that are out outside are coming in and it's not what's supposed to happen for the most part So it''s just even helping them with a with the barrier For the butter Epsom salt baths, we highly, highly recommend.

It's like a sincere therapy. You know, it one helps detoxify these kids or adults, anybody. I mean, kids are, this is anybody dealing with a skin issue.

And then, you know it also just helps with your nervous system, all the things to help you just calm down. Then we follow that up with some Chinese herbs that are targeted for staff.

And for itch, because if you are experiencing eczema, you know, undoubtedly you have a higher count of sap on the skin. So we need to address that, but without suppressing it and killing it, and off your whole skin microbiome.

You know? If you wouldn't want to take antibiotics for your gut microbiomes, right? The same sort of thing, like it affects it. the same way. So we want to keep that balance, but still address the itch.

And then we just follow that up with the most nutritive bioavailable moisturizing cream that you possibly can. We do a Italo Castor Oil based cream, and it just really helps seal everything in and starts to rebuild us skin barrier.

But we call that the skin comfort trio. Those three steps, it's really four with a bath, really sets you up for rebuilding the skin barrier and outside in while you're working on the inside out to see, you know, more positive effects.

Sounds great. So you teach parents how to rebuild their child's gut lining and detox pathways. And what does that actually look like day to day in a real family with limited time and a lot of overwhelm?

Yeah. Well, like, you know, and I know your listeners know you need prebiotics, right? You need to beat the beneficial bacteria. And we're addressing a dysbiosis.

Like if you're experiencing eczema of any kind, then the bad bugs are winning, essentially. They're winning the war. And so we need to give the beneficial microbes like a fighting chance.

So that starts with prebiotics and that the best way to do that is to eat a varied seasonal, you know, digestible diet. And, so that's real whole foods that are seasonal like pretty much all meats, all, fruits and vegetables and gluten-free gates.

preparing all of that properly and combining them all properly, and then just omitting these just a few eczema specific things that doesn't go well for people with this specific condition, like vinegar, you know, because it's a yeast product.

And so, it was made from yeast. So things like that. You just keep in mind really high, high histamine foods, fermented foods.

Healing the Gut with Diet and Prebiotics

Unfortunately, the things are counterintuitive that they're acclaimed to be like the all almighty in gut healing rate, but for this specific place, like fermented foods are just too high in histamine and the same goes for bone broth as well.

So yeah, it's keeping out what needs to be out for the healing period and that's certainly, you know, the standard things like the gluten and commercial dairy and processed sugar and certainly any dyes or preservatives and things like that.

But, you know, especially in kids' diets, like these things are ubiquitous, right? And so, even things, preservative is like citric acid. A lot of people don't know it's made from mold.

It's like a byproduct of mold feeding on sugar. You know there's just so much that you can do just by, there is a handful of things that could take out on top of the standard allergenic foods and then just focus on a varied seasonal whole foods diet and you'll, that will do a lot in rebuilding, in re-building the gut.

Yeah. And to help your body create, you know, the short chain fatty acids that are required for a healthy microbiome, like all those things, right? It starts with the fiber and the probiotics and all of those that they're going into the diet.

That's great. So many families come to you after trying steroids, elimination diets, probiotics, even biologics with no long-term success. Why do those approaches fall short?

And what do you think is missing from the conventional model? Yeah, unfortunately, all those things are just dealing with the symptoms. cause and, you know, they're prescribing really serious drugs for kids younger and younger.

And younger, I added to my program that was on biologics that it was onto, and there's serious trucks and it's put them on these, these medicines, corticosteroids and biologics without even any plan to eventually wean them off and that's what's like most shocking to me but because some people have to use steroids and thats fine to just get over what is going on here or address an infection or you know something thats like really serious and and Thats fine but then anytime that you're employing these these tools is should always be paired with a plan to get off of them because ultimately, it's just clear skin pharmaceutical free food free kids.

So yeah, they're just not addressing like the dysbiosis and yeah. everything that's happening on the inside. They're treating the bacteria on outside and then they're suppressing the immune system.

And so that what I find sadder is like right with these kids, the parents are told this is the only way. You have to move forward with this and they trust what's being told to them by a medical professional, of course.

you know, things do get better for a period of time, but then it might get worse or they just stop working and they need stronger sugar stuff or just never worked at all.

And then still the body just creates these dependencies so quickly to, you now, corticosteroids in particular. Man,

once you try to wean off, the flare comes back even further, right?

Because it's been suppressed for however long that you've been using these drugs. The immune system has taken a toll and so it is such a hard cycle to work yourself out of.

You absolutely can, but ideally you don't get started there in the first place because then it is an extra hurdle that you're going to have to jump later because it's not addressing what it actually is called.

Yeah, absolutely. So in your program, you emphasize healing the environment, both internal and external. What are some of the most overlooked environmental triggers parents should know about?

EMF is certainly one, you know, like that's ubiquitous. Like there's nothing that you can do to get away from it, but there are certain things that can you do certainly in your home to just lessen or we're trying to decrease the amount of inflammatory assaults that are happening on our kids all day, every day.

So if you could do a simple thing like unplug your router at night, right? Like a router's job is just to send that signal. And just, to back up a little bit, EMFS for people who don't understand that, that is electronic magnetic frequencies.

The sort of like the vibrational output of screens and electronic devices and wireless internet. Yes. Thank you. It's just like, okay, stuff like that.

That'd be one that probably most people don't think of. By the time they come to me, like they're filtering their water. Like these are healthy people, they are doing their best.

They're not using Windex, but if you are, that's certainly an easy thing to swap out. My cleaning products are vinegar, baking soda, and tea tree oil.

So easy. So that's a big thing. Just the air mold test, just like the at home mold tests is like a really good place to start. If that is at all a worry in the back of your mind, like maybe there's some sort of mold thing, you can just get like agar plates relatively inexpensively and send it to their lab and then they'll let you know if there is something that you need to address there.

But yeah, those are some things that you could start with, given that, you've already done the laundry and you're using chemicals all over the house and around the House.

Yes. And just for our listeners, I just want to remind you that I do have a five-part series on how to lower your everyday toxic burden. There's a whole episode on cleaning products and things like that.

getting the harsh chemicals out of that. All right. Well, you've helped hundreds of families achieve full reversal of eczema. Congratulations. And what patterns do you see in the kids who heal the fastest?

Consistency, right? Because you can do anything for days, exact same as going to the gym, one day, not going cut it, and it doesn't need to be perfection.

In these days you're tired and you don't do the whole thing. But if you keep going.

Why Conventional Treatments Fall Short

Like if you're doing it for the most part every day, there can't be, you know, and I know your audience knows this, but like the IGG half-life, like if your sensitive to a food, right, then you have an IGD sensitivity, versus an IgE allergy.

The half life of that is like 21 days, so even when you a cheat cupcake, because everyone's having that, or you with your friend, you know, when you're drinking your latte, like, it matters, unfortunately, just for this, intensive, if you just consider it an intensive for your gut, for gut.

And really mind these major roles, the no gluten, conventional dairy, and the pretty easy things to mitigate these days, those families achieve success.

That makes the most sense, yeah, consistent with what you are doing. Parents dealing with chronic eczema often feel like they're failing. How do you help them shift their mindset so that they can finally move from panic and guilt into clarity and action?

put on their skin exactly what to give them and how to, right? I remember, you read all these things, everyone that comes to me, they're so well-researched.

They've tried so many things and they were worried about so things. And I was in the exact same boat. I remembered diaper changes for my baby would take 20 minutes because I had to re-moisturize her completely.

The skin was literally falling off of her body. Then I said, oh no, she's stressed. My baby's stress because i'm such a horrible parent and I can't get this.

And, you know, all the things and of course I'm stressed and it's like, but I am doing my best because, of, course you want to heal this and is stressful.

But, knowing like the stress is the dysbiosis that we spoke to. Like that is real, bodily stress and they're not like mental. That's what's determining their behavior and their skin and all of the unfortunate about this condition.

And so if you can really just look at it as we are going on a gut healing journey and Like, oh, the why, right? I had cesareans, I worked in the dental industry, like I did a lot wrong.

I took birth control in my 20s, you know? Yeah, okay, can't change it. And you, do what you can. Do what can control. Look into mold, filter your water, eat vegetables, healthy food.

There's so much in your control, but that stuff that's outside that already happened, That's okay, you're doing the best for your kid and it's that. I think what gives you the most peace as a parent, as caretaker, is when your head hits the pillow and you know you've done everything you possibly can, that gives your soul a lot of peace.

And really, just look at it as like this is a medical issue. but it's reversible and just go and write it out until you get there. Yeah, that's great.

So for parents listening who are in a severe flare right now, what is the one thing they can do today that will start calming the skin while they work on the deeper root cause issues?

Well, you know, I think the two of the strongest tools are, are herbal oils and have some salt baths as far as, as topicals go. Like they, it matters.

It matters so much.

Environmental Triggers and Family Mindset

And we talked about the benefits. There's just like getting those things. it's like taking supplements through the skin in both cases and that works wonders.

I just, you know, with kids, It's hard to get that many supplements in everything needs to be. basically like food based and you know, if you could just absorb the supplements.

Yeah, the tropical is wonderful for kids. You don't have to get them to swallow anything. Standing over the applesauce like eat it. Do you have any advice for parents who are trying to Get their kids to eat a more varied diet like maybe vegetables or something that they're just not the kids aren't really thrilled about eating like How do you broaden their palette, so to speak?

Well, you know, I would say kids two and under. They will, even if you haven't been doing it this way, they might pitch a fit for a day or two. If you change things up on them and you're like you used to be egos and now it's not that it is quinoa flakes.

get over it, like very, very quickly. And, you know, even if they're two, they are old enough to acknowledge, my two-year-old, I was like, well, now we're eating carob chips, and chocolate, right?

To help with your spots. She could understand that, she was motivated to change because she's miserable. Right? She was feeling awful. Anyone over two the same thing.

You have to get their buy-ins. Like, you don't want to feel this way. This is a bummer. These are the changes that we have make to start to eradicate this.

The suffering is so real. They should be on board. There doesn't have be that much. We just talk about, like, eczema hasn't been a thing for our family for a really long time, but we just talk about grow foods, and we talk, you know, the benefits in language that, like, whatever motivates them.

And, my 10-year-old specifically is very motivated to grow. So, she's like okay, all right, give me the spirulina smoothie. You know? So it just really talked to them about why they're on board.

That's awesome. If they are too young to understand, then they'll just eat it. And so where can people find information about your products and your methods?

I host the eczema kids podcast. You have been a guest there and that's going to air soon. So I'm really excited about that. And, uh, so that just, I've been doing this for almost four years.

Free resource about every single thing is related to this this issue and my website is Exima kids calm and I have a whole eczema shop with the method So we just take you through like one-on-one like how this is how you do it We come up with a plan just based for your situation your your child or you I?

Daily Relief Tools and Kid-Friendly Food Tips

Have a lot of adult clients as well because yeah, it's real and then skincare as while we have the skin cover trio and and Exma safe sunscreen and all the things pre-biotic tea.

It's it super fun. So exima kids comm Awesome, awesome. Well, thank you so much for joining me on the functional edge. And I hope today's episode gave you fresh insights and practical tools to level up your life.

So if you found value in what you heard, don't forget to hit the subscribe and share button, especially with someone who needs it and leave a review. It's the best way to support our mission of bringing powerful health solutions to more people.

Stay strong, stay healthy and keep living on the functional edge. Thank you for joining me on The Functional Edge. I hope today's episode gave you fresh insights and practical tools to level up your life.

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