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#SKINVISIBILITY



A LOOK AT ECZEMA ON DIVERSE SKIN TONES

## #SKINVISIBILITY

**At Aveeno® Canada, one of the ways we are working to advance skin health equity is with a focus on eczema awareness to help close the education gap in skin of colour.**

Though eczema is a common skin condition, experts believe it is underdiagnosed for people of colour. This is due in part to the fact that historically, physicians have been trained primarily to diagnose eczema on lighter skin tones. With this in mind, we've collaborated with industry experts and healthcare professionals, to help create more positive health outcomes for Canadian consumers and patients, by increasing awareness of eczema on darker skin tones. We believe it is imperative to be proactive in taking care of your skin. Becoming knowledgeable about symptoms and being able to explain what you are experiencing to your health care provider can be helpful for proper diagnosis.

We hope you enjoy this book. With the help of the Canadian dermatology community and Canadians living with eczema, we aim to continue our work in creating resources like this, which can help advance our commitment to skin health equity.



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Lillian Maxwell



Durka Muru



Brigitte Truong



THE PATIENTS

Natasha Kaycee



Anika Bodden



Ashley Cavaliere



Ruchika Karnani



Angela Liang



Eunice Zhou



Tristian Liu



## THE EXPERTS



**Dr. Zaki Taher, MD BSC. FRCPC,**  
Board-Certified Dermatologist

Dr. Zaki Taher is a board-certified dermatologist and is the founder and medical director of Lucere Dermatology & Laser Clinics, specializing in Medical & Cosmetic Dermatology services. After completing his Dermatology residency at the University of Alberta, Dr. Taher went on to complete a prestigious Fellowship at the University of Ottawa in Laser Surgery & Cosmetic Dermatology. His areas of special interest include general medical dermatology, precancers and skin cancer management, along with medical and cosmetic applications of lasers in cutaneous surgery and rejuvenation.



**Dr. Sonya Abdulla, MSc MD FRCPC DABD,**  
Medical and Cosmetic Dermatologist

Dr. Sonya Abdulla is a double board-certified dermatologist in Canada and the US. She completed additional Fellowship training in Dermatologic Laser Surgery and Aesthetic Medicine from the University of Toronto. Dr Abdulla has a blended medical and aesthetic dermatology practice in downtown Toronto. Her areas of clinical interest include acne, rosacea, psoriasis and eczema. She has a diverse procedural practice with an emphasis on injectables, lasers and energy-based devices.



**Dr. Geeta Yadav, Board-Certified Dermatologist**  
Founder of FACET Dermatology

Dr. Geeta Yadav is a board-certified dermatologist and the founder of FACET Dermatology in Toronto. Deeply passionate about both general and cosmetic dermatology, Dr. Yadav's methodologies are inspired by both her upbringing as a second generation Canadian and education in international health. Dr. Yadav is a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. She remains highly passionate about education and currently volunteers on the University of Toronto's Governing Council, in addition to serving as a Lecturer at the Temerty Faculty of Medicine.



**Dr. Russell Wong, FRCPC, FAAD,**  
Medical and Cosmetic Dermatologist

Dr. Russell Wong is a medical and cosmetic dermatologist who is fully licensed in Canada and the United States. He is the medical director of Rejuvenation Dermatology Windermere. Dr. Wong is active in the dermatology community where he tends to hospital patients while on-call and teaches dermatology residents. His clinical interests include medical, surgical and cosmetic dermatology.

## WHAT IS ECZEMA?

According to Dr. Sonya Abdulla, a medical and cosmetic dermatologist, “Eczema is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that is characterized by inflamed, itchy patches on areas like the face and folds. While the areas of involvement are typically red and scaly on White skin, it tends to be more of a purple hue or ash-grey colour in darker skin tones, making the confirmation of diagnosis more challenging.”

“Eczema is more common in Asian and Black ethnic groups than White populations; however, in a recent study in England, higher socioeconomic status was associated with a greater incidence of eczema in infants younger than 2 and it was observed that the opposite was seen for all other age groups.”<sup>1</sup>

— Dr. Zaki Taher

<sup>1</sup> The epidemiology of eczema in children and adults in England: A population-based study using primary care data Simon de Lusignan, 1, 2 Helen Alexander, 3 Conor Broderick, 3 John Dennis, 4 Andrew McGovern, 4 Claire Feeney, 5 and Carsten Flohr 3



Eczema on hands



Eczema on neck



## ECZEMA ON DIVERSE SKIN TONES: SYMPTOMS AND APPEARANCES

Dr. Geeta Yadav, a board-certified dermatologist and founder of FACET Dermatology, states that, “Eczema may appear pink or red in fair skin. However, in skin of colour, eczema can present as brown, purple, or gray/’ashy’. Eczema causes inflammation; skin of colour is more likely to develop post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, or darkening of the skin, after a flareup.”



Eczema on  
inner arm



**Eczema around lips,  
below nose**



Eczema on  
elbow

## CHALLENGES OF DIAGNOSING ECZEMA ON PATIENTS OF COLOUR

According to Dr. Yadav, diagnosing eczema on people with darker skin tones can be challenging. “For many years, the textbook examples that helped doctors learn to recognize skin conditions were of those concerns on White skin; often, skin concerns look different depending on the colour of the patient’s skin. Thanks to new textbooks, more patients of colour have been able to receive accurate diagnoses. Though we’ve made great progress, there is still a long way to go towards ensuring equitable treatment amongst all patients.”

If you think you may have eczema, Dr. Abdulla recommends “Communicating your symptoms and the impact they are having on your quality of life. Itch is the predominant symptom seen with eczema – while much of the inflammation may be difficult to appreciate in darker skin tones, the degree of itch can help highlight the severity. Additionally, previous success or failure with treatment should be identified – if you have previously tried any number of treatments that have not been successful, it’s important to share these to avoid repeating the same cycle. Keep in mind, a treatment success in eczema means improvement or resolution of the signs and symptoms of eczema. This may be temporary given the relapsing nature of eczema but should still be successful.”



A close-up photograph of a person's chest. The person is wearing a dark brown, ribbed, long-sleeved cardigan with a V-neckline and buttons. The skin on the chest is visible, and there is a small, dark, scaly patch of eczema located in the center of the chest, just above the V-neckline. A white arrow points downwards from the text 'Eczema on chest' to this patch.

**Eczema on chest**

A close-up photograph of a person's upper arm, showing a small, reddish, irritated patch of skin. The person is wearing a light-colored, ribbed tank top. The background is a soft, light green color.

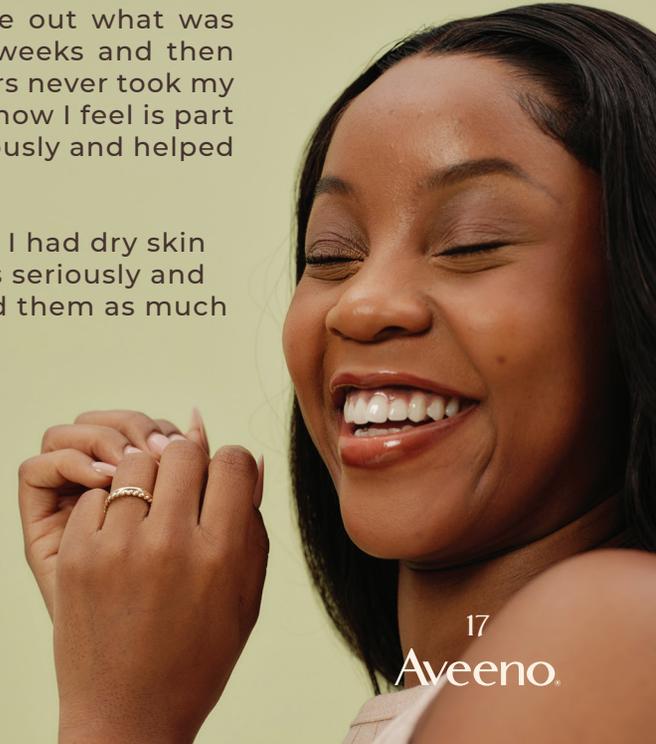
Eczema on  
upper arm →

## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

“I got diagnosed with eczema in 2013 after years of trying to figure out what was happening to my skin. The flare ups were random and would last weeks and then disappear out of nowhere. Because they were so minimal, most doctors never took my concern seriously since it wasn’t a ‘big deal’ to them. To me, skin and how I feel is part of my confidence and I was happy when a doctor finally took me seriously and helped me to be able to manage the flare ups and discomfort.”

“It took over 2 years to get diagnosed because many doctors just said I had dry skin and needed to moisturize. Finally, when one doctor took my concerns seriously and evaluated me, he was able to help me manage the flare ups and avoid them as much as I can.”

— **Natasha Kaycee**





## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

“The skin is usually a lot darker, some areas have more hyperpigmentation, dry, sometimes red, flakey and cracked.”

— Anika Bodden

A back view of a person with dark, curly hair pulled up. The person is wearing a light blue t-shirt. On the back of the neck, there is a visible area of skin irritation, likely eczema, located along the hairline. A thin black line with an arrowhead points from the text 'Eczema on hairline' to this area.

**Eczema on hairline**



Eczema on hand

## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

“I was diagnosed with eczema in 2016 and have experienced very bad flare-ups that have made it painful for me to do simple things like wash dishes, my hair, or even just bathing my children. It took a year for me to be diagnosed. When it first started to appear, my doctor thought I had a simple rash from the jewelry I would wear. Until it started to spread and progress.”

— Ashley Cavaliere





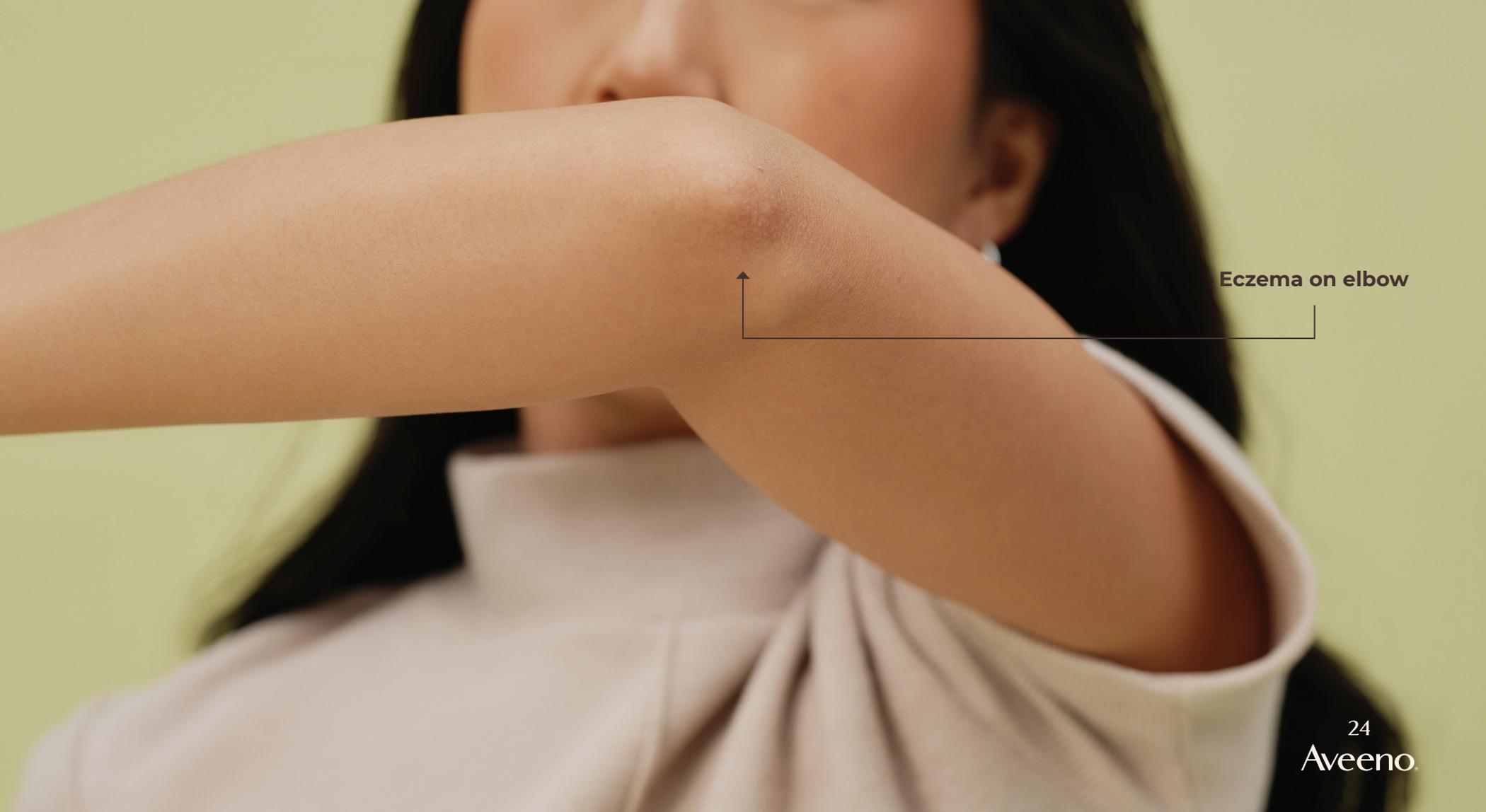
## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

"I started seeing and feeling eczema develop on my arms at about 13 or 14 years old. It has always affected my arms and around my nose which were points of extreme insecurity for me growing up. The eczema on my arms was easier to hide with clothing but tough any time they were exposed in gym class. My face has always been a different story because if the eczema isn't dry then it's red. The flare ups affected my self-esteem as a teenager greatly and has always been a priority to hide."

— **Brigitte Truong**

Eczema on shoulder,  
post flare-up





Eczema on elbow





## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

“I noticed my eczema appeared two winters ago after I gave birth to my baby. I was disheartened because I was very familiar with what it was and dreaded the journey of learning to deal with it. I was also in disbelief because it came on suddenly and I had never experienced it in the past. My eczema interrupts my day to day with its constant irritation and itchiness, it’s hard to ignore! The sudden and random flare-ups are also discouraging because I’m constantly wondering what I did wrong this time?”

— Eunice Zhou





## COMMON TRIGGERS

“Eczema is largely triggered by disruption of the skin barrier – this is the outer most layer of the skin that protects us from the outside world, namely allergens and irritants. It is also the layer that locks in hydration. Common triggers include extreme weather exposures like cold, dry weather or intense heat and humidity. Certain skin care products can be irritating including those with fragrance. Friction and rubbing can also trigger a flare of eczema.”

— **Dr. Sonya Abdulla**





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## IMPACT ON SKIN OF COLOUR

“Eczema is a form of skin inflammation, and inflammation will often trigger post-inflammatory or eczema-associated discoloration. While treatment algorithms are largely the same in all skin tones, the threshold to advance therapy in darker skin colour may be lower given this tendency toward discoloration. We see this trend in many inflammatory skin conditions including eczema, acne and rosacea where early intervention is key to improve symptoms and quality of life early on, but also to prevent long-term consequences such as discoloration.”

— **Dr. Abdulla**

According to Dr. Taher, on Asian skin, “Inflammatory lesions can appear dark and active, lesions can appear thickened and/or scaly and/or dark; as lesions improve with treatment there can be post-inflammatory darkening or lightening of the skin. On Brown skin tones, active lesions may appear red-brown or purple-brown to black; older persistent lesions may be thickened, darker and heaped up; over time with resolution there can be post-inflammatory darkening or lightening.”



## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

“My mom brought me to the pediatrician who ended up diagnosing me with eczema and promptly gave me a prescription for some type of cortisone cream. While the medicated cream helped to an extent, it still would be a day-to-day hardship dealing with the irritating rashes that would cover my body. As I’ve aged, my eczema is more manageable as I am more mindful of the products I put on my skin and the materials that I wear and yet there’s a level which I cannot control, like how breakouts are worse in the winter seasons or how my pregnancies seem to make my eczema worse.”

— Lillian Maxwell



Eczema on hand









Eczema on inner arm



## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

“My eczema is almost exclusively stress-induced, but once it flares up, it can be worsened by factors including diet, environment, climate, specific product ingredients, and more. I aim to keep my stress as controlled as possible while also living a generally healthy lifestyle to further reduce the risk of an outbreak.”

— Ruchika Karnani

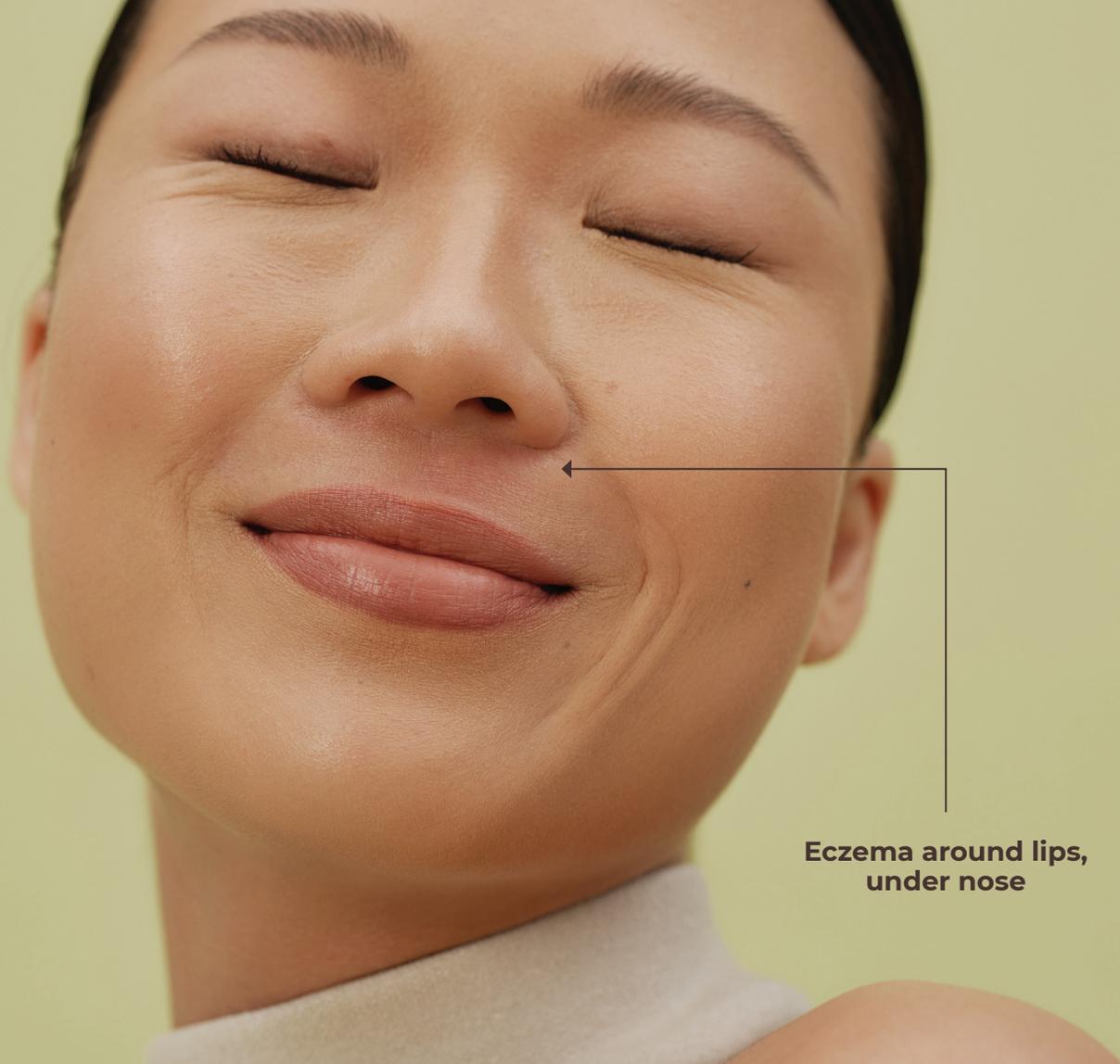


## PATIENT POV: MY EXPERIENCE WITH ECZEMA

“I do feel like I have to put more effort in when I get ready to go out - make sure I exfoliate my skin properly so that the eczema doesn't get flaky, and for me what I found has helped, is getting a regular intake of natural vitamin D, and regularly exercising. It can be a bit of a struggle, but so far, I have found that works best for me.”

— **Angela Liang**





**Eczema around lips,  
under nose**



Eczema around lips,  
under nose





“Trust your gut, ask for a referral to a dermatologist, and monitor your flare ups to try to identify your triggers.”

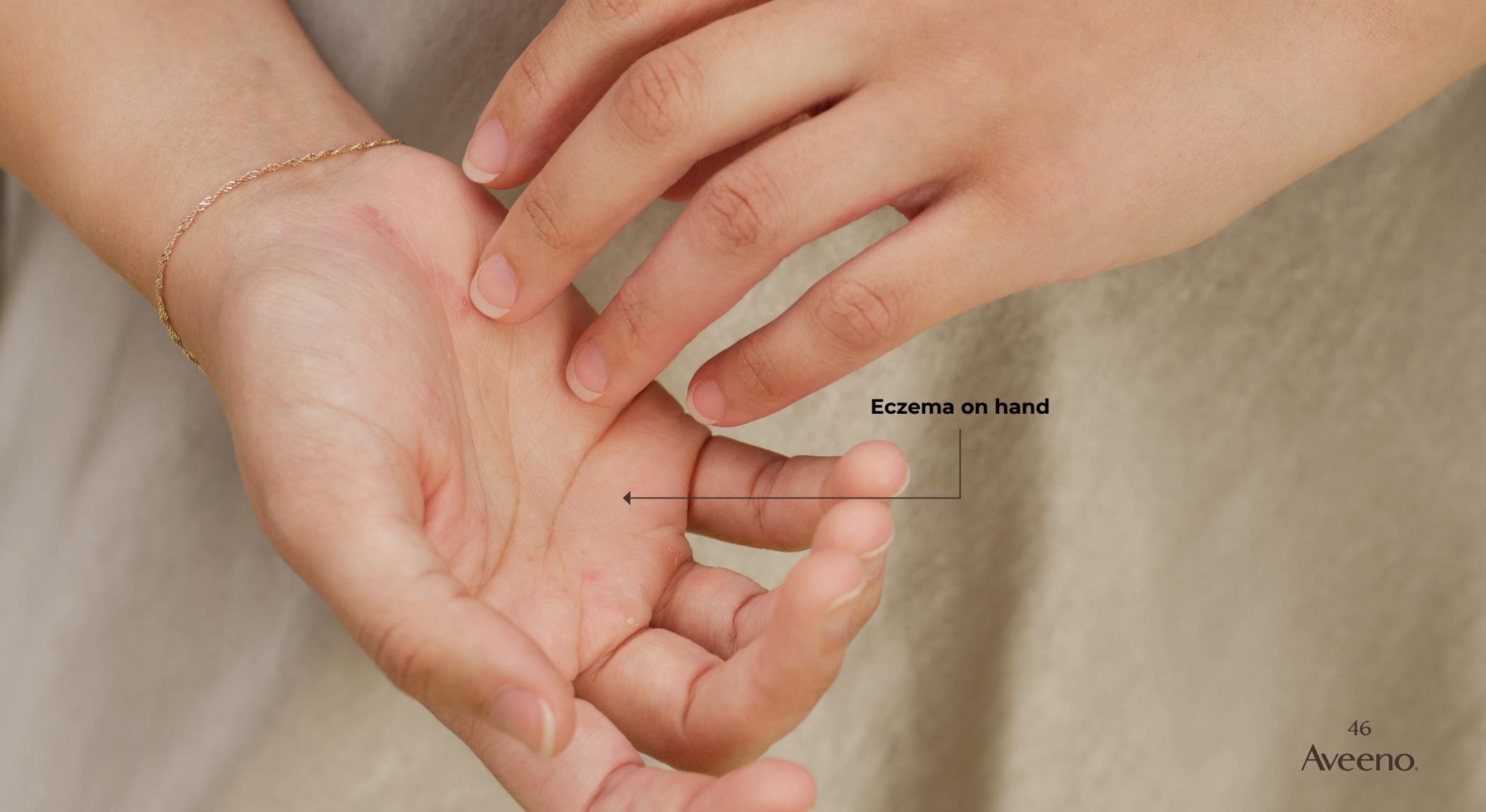
– **Ashley Cavaliere**

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

“Bring up any concerns early. Keep track of skin changes and flare-ups so you can give your medical provider as much information as possible. I found that taking photos of Tristan’s skin helped me know if his skin was improving or getting worse and also helped the doctor to make a diagnosis.”

— **Tristan Liu’s mother**

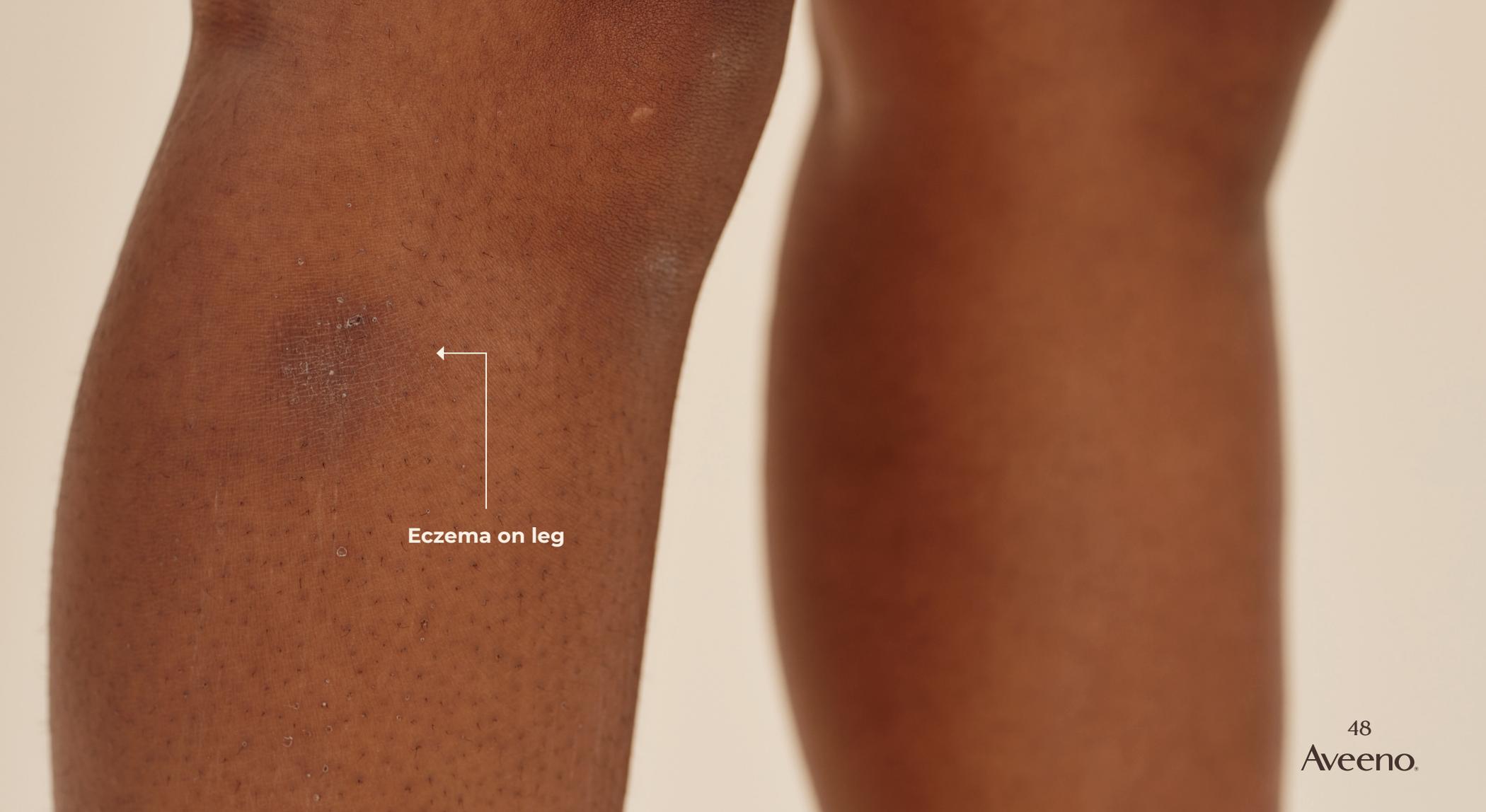




**Eczema on hand**







Eczema on leg

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU BELIEVE YOU WERE MISDIAGNOSED

Medical and cosmetic dermatologist, Dr. Russell Wong, confirms that “it is always okay to seek a second opinion. Ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a specialist.”

“There is nothing wrong with getting a second opinion. Though it can feel intimidating to contradict a medical professional, it’s critical to advocate for yourself if you think something isn’t right with your treatment or care. There is a group of professionals known as patient advocates, who can help you do this if you feel you are unable to do so alone.”

— **Dr. Geeta Yadav**

## TRIAL & ERROR

“I went through lots of trial and error as my eczema presented itself in a very unusual way; I got various opinions from professionals and underwent multiple allergy tests, biopsies, prescription trials, holistic treatments and more over the course of four months, but was finally diagnosed with eczema.

While waiting for answers, I further researched the information I collected along the way to gain more insight and implement some changes myself. Whether it was reworking my diet or incorporating more eczema-controlling mindfulness practices into my daily routine, taking healing into my own hands is something that helped me during the waiting period, and I’d recommend this to those looking for answers as well. Expert opinions are crucial but often take time to get, and I find that catering your daily routine to be in favour of healing in the interim, even in the smallest ways, can help mitigate factors that complicate the diagnosis process.”

— **Ruchika Karnani**





Eczema on hand



## ECZEMA ON BABIES OR CHILDREN

According to Dr. Wong, “eczema on babies typically appears during the first 2 years of life and is the most common form of eczema. It is seen more commonly in children with a family history of eczema.”<sup>2</sup>

“It most frequently manifests as a rash in the folds of the skin, such as behind your baby’s knees or around the mouth and face. It can be triggered by moisture (water trapped in the folds of the neck or drool on the face). It can be soothed with some creams and ointments; it’s helpful to avoid irritants like soap or fragranced detergent. The good news is that eczema on babies can often resolve on its own with good hydration and skin protection.”

— **Dr. Yadav**

<sup>2</sup> Bologna, J., Jorizzo, J. and Schaffer, J., 2018. *Dermatology*. [Philadelphia]: Elsevier Saunders.

## MOTHERHOOD & ECZEMA

“When my son Tristan was around 3 to 4 months old, we noticed a lot of red, bumpy patches all over his skin but mostly on his upper body. One night during the winter, we dressed him in thick pyjamas. The next morning, his neck was extremely inflamed and irritated and he was so itchy - it was really hard to see our little baby so uncomfortable. Thankfully, we’ve gotten to a point where Tristan’s eczema is mostly under control. We have a solid skincare routine that works well, and we have steroid creams to use when we notice a severe flare-up.”

— **Tristian Liu’s mother**



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Eczema on hands

## LIVING WITH ECZEMA

“The first thing I used to think about when I had eczema on my knuckles was how to shake someone’s hand in a way where they wouldn’t have to touch my eczema. It was the FIRST thing that I would think about when I went out. ‘Are people going to see my dry patch? ‘Did I cover it well enough with makeup?’”.

— **Angela Liang**

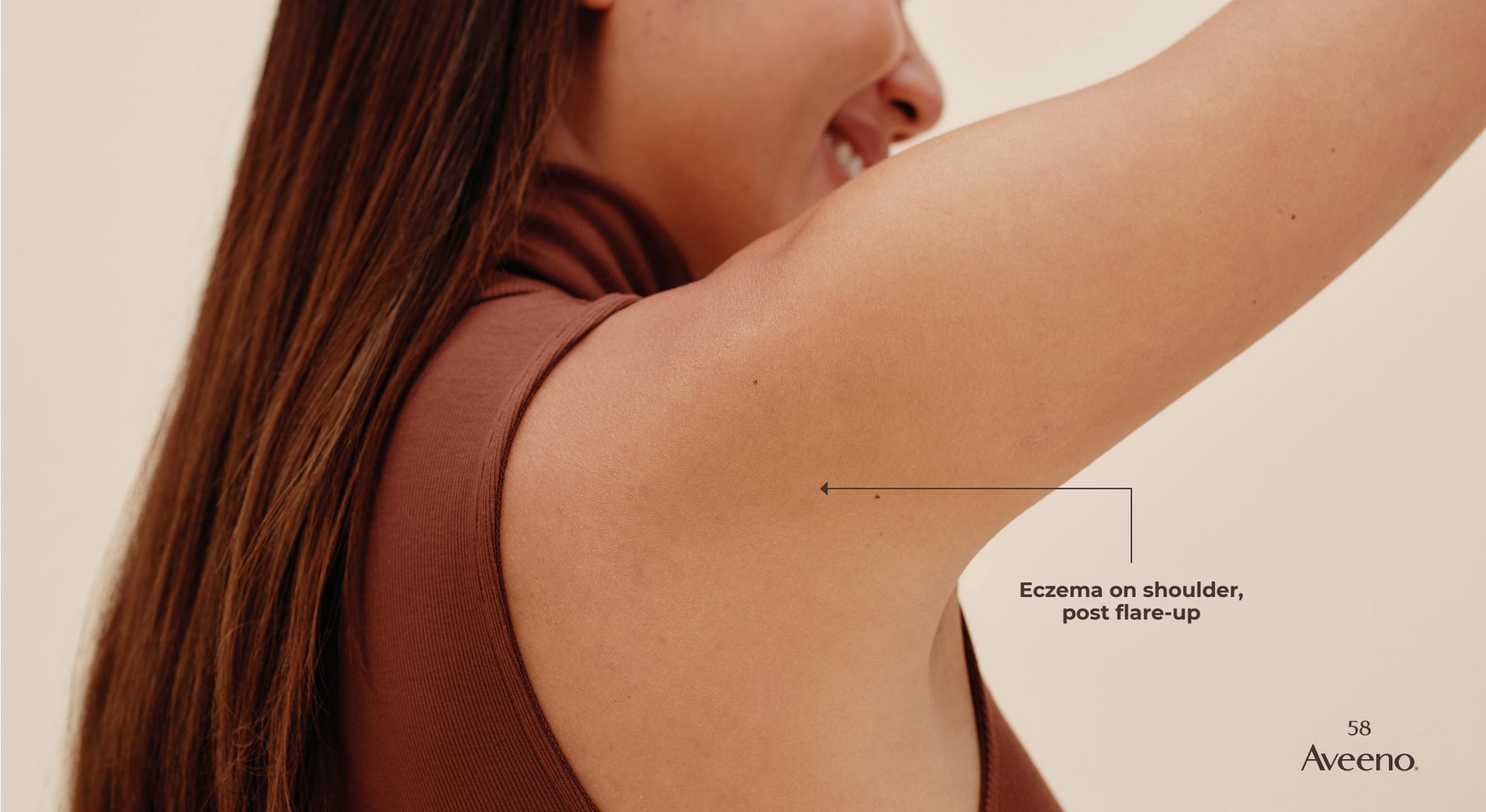


## LIVING WITH ECZEMA

“I’ve had eczema all my life, but as I got older it started to flare up more. With some of my eczema being on my face, it’s definitely weighed on my confidence and how I feel about myself. For a really long time I would cover it up with colour correctors from makeup brands and then with foundation, concealers and powders. The older I have gotten the more I have learned to fully embrace my skin condition and not hide behind it. Having it is nothing to be ashamed of or self conscious about when it’s not something I have full control over.”

— **Anika Bodden**





**Eczema on shoulder,  
post flare-up**

## LIVING WITH ECZEMA

“I would recommend to anyone who’s experiencing eczema-like symptoms to consult with their general practitioner and a dermatologist before rushing to judgement, but to do so quickly so that they can alleviate their symptoms before they get worse.”

— **Brigitte Truong**



Eczema on leg





## LIVING WITH ECZEMA

“The first memory I have of it was on my lower back and my parents took me to the doctors to get a steroid cream for it. Since then, I have always struggled with eczema because I am constantly itching, and it has become second nature to naturally itch without even realizing it. Every night when I go to bed, I have a hard time falling asleep especially during the colder months because of how much I itch before bed. I have never been able to shave my legs because it irritates my eczema and I get flare ups as well.”

— **Durka Muru**



## ECZEMA TREATMENT

“If you can identify and neutralize the trigger, do so. You can temporarily help soothe itchy skin by moisturizing or using an antihistamine, but most often, cooling the skin and using anti-inflammatory treatments like hydrocortisone will most effectively alleviate any discomfort. Even if mild, my preference is for all eczema patients to be evaluated and treated by a dermatologist – even if just for the initial visit to learn how to manage their skin. Dermatologists may prescribe treatments like topical steroids or steroid-sparing agents, and they can also offer newer and advanced therapies to provide relief to patients suffering from eczema.”

— Dr. Yadav

## HOW TO ALLEVIATE ECZEMA SYMPTOMS

Dr. Abdulla recommends, “Identify the potential exposure and do your best to limit exposure moving forward. Then look toward simplifying your skin care with barrier-targeted ingredients. Simple cleanser with key ingredients in the morning, as well as before bed. Regular moisturizer will help restore the skin barrier and make it more resilient in the future. Additionally, oatmeal baths are shown to be highly successful in providing symptomatic relief quickly for patients.”

“Every patient is different and it is important for patients to know that. Taking ownership of your disease will allow you to have the best outcomes. I encourage patients to keep an accurate journal of things that tend to happen a day or two, and sometimes even longer before a flare. Journaling is very helpful.”

— **Dr. Taher**





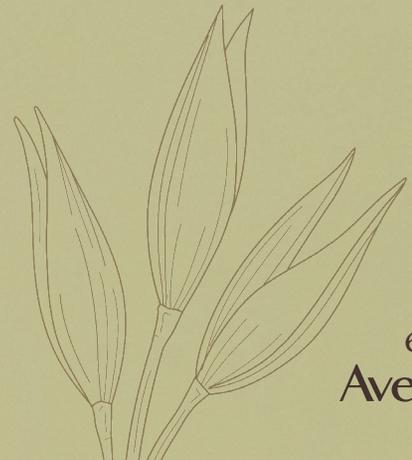




## RESOURCES

For more information, please visit the 'Eczema in Skin of Colour' hub at:  
[www.aveeno.ca/skin-hair-solutions/eczema/skin-of-colour](http://www.aveeno.ca/skin-hair-solutions/eczema/skin-of-colour)

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## SPECIAL THANKS

Aveeno® Canada would like to thank our team of dermatologist experts, models, production crew, stylists, makeup artists, hair experts, and photographer for helping bring this book to life. It took an immense amount of work, and it would not exist without the invaluable contributions of a number of incredibly talented, supportive, and knowledgeable individuals and organizations. We hope this book provides you with the education and resources to help you or someone you know with eczema.

### Models:

Anika Bodden  
Ashley Cavaliere  
Angela Liang  
Brigitte Truong  
Durka Muru  
Eunice Zhou  
Lillian Maxwell  
Natasha Kaycee  
Ruchika Karnani  
Tristan Liu

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Dermatologist  
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## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> The epidemiology of eczema in children and adults in England: A population-based study using primary care data, Simon de Lusignan, <sup>1</sup>, <sup>2</sup> Helen Alexander, <sup>3</sup> Conor Broderick, <sup>3</sup> John Dennis, <sup>4</sup> Andrew McGovern, <sup>4</sup> Claire Feeney, <sup>5</sup> and Carsten Flohr <sup>3</sup> — (Dr.Taher, page 6)

<sup>2</sup> Bologna, J., Jorizzo, J. and Schaffer, J., 2018. Dermatology. [Philadelphia]: Elsevier Saunders. — (Dr. Wong, page 50)

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