

Eczema Triggers

7 SNEAKY SOURCES MAKING YOUR FLARE WORSE



If you're suffering with an eczema flare you know how horrible it can be. It might start with dry skin and a little nagging itch that eventually you just can't ignore. You find yourself constantly scratching until the skin becomes red, irritated, and maybe even bloody. It becomes so consuming that you find it difficult to focus on tasks and work. You can't sleep either which compounds the problem and makes you irritable and frustrated.

The worst part of having eczema may be the fear or shame you feel about going out in public with your wounds. People stare. Your friends and family ask questions. Your kids may recoil when you go to pick them up and they see it on your arm. Everyone can see what's happening on the outside, but they don't know the desperation and anxiety you feel on the inside.

Living with eczema can be a "nightmare"... but it doesn't have to be this way.

I'm Dr. Stephanie Davis and I treat patients with eczema all of the time. I'm a Functional Medicine Practitioner, microbiologist, wife, mom, and eczema survivor. I found my root causes and I can help you do it too.

It's frustrating when you're doing all of the right things, but you're still not getting any relief.

Most practitioners say the triggers are pollen, dust, dander, mold, smoke, perfumes, chemicals, detergents and soaps, and foods such as gluten, dairy, peanuts, soy, fish and eggs.

But many people eliminate these and still find themselves with red, itchy, oozing skin, and no relief in sight.

If you've been suffering with eczema and can't seem to get rid of it, one or more of these seven not-so-obvious triggers may be to blame for your symptoms. This guide will help you troubleshoot some of the hidden places that triggers can lurk, and help you stop that flare from getting even worse.

7 Sneaky Eczema Triggers Making Your Flare Worse

1. Consuming "super foods" that aren't so super for you. We live in a high tech world with information overload. Food and health bloggers, online health summits, and even the media are touting foods such as bone broth, fermented foods, protein powders, and greens supplements as healthy, but they may not be for you (at least right now).

Fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi, yogurt, kefir, pickles, natto, tempeh, lassi, kombucha, and kvass, are loaded with probiotics and beneficial nutrients, but they're also high in histamines. Histamines are inflammatory mediating chemicals produced by your body, but also by bacteria, that cause the stereotypical allergic responses that include itchy skin, rashes and hives. Unfortunately, many healthy foods including bone broth are also high in histamine.

Protein powders and greens supplements are also nutritional powerhouses, but they can also contain many hidden triggers such as gluten, dairy, egg, nuts, and soy, as well as additives, emulsifiers, and fillers. Since there are often many ingredients in these types of products it can be difficult to identify the exact trigger(s). You can even have a reaction to an all organic, high quality product if you're sensitive to a single ingredient.

These are among the top items I have clients avoid but this doesn't mean you have to stay away from these forever.

2. You're really eating a TON of histamine and didn't even know it. Histamine lurks in many places in your diet. Fermented foods, as discussed above, are high in histamine because they are aged. Any time a food ages, histamine and other compounds are produced as a by-product of the degradation process. Some foods are naturally high in histamine themselves or are histamine liberators (trigger the body to produce histamine).

Regardless of the source, reducing total burden of histamine is an important to decrease pruritus (itching) and inflammation.

Histamine is hiding everywhere. Here are some of the most common sources:

- Aged Cheeses
- Alcohol- especially beer, wine, and champagne
- Anchovies/Sardines/Tinned or Packaged Fish
- Bone Broth/Stock (long or slow cooked varieties)
- Chocolate and Cocoa
- Citrus Fruits (lemon, lime, oranges, etc.)
- Cured and Deli Meats (bacon, sausage, salami, ham, etc.)
- Dried Fruits (prunes, raisins, dates, etc.)
- Fermented foods (sauerkraut, kefir, kombucha, yogurt, etc.)
- Fish and Shellfish
- Pickled and Preserved Foods
- Products made from soy, wheat, or yeast
- Some Fruit & Vegetables (banana, kiwi, papaya, pineapple, strawberry, spinach, tomato)
- Vinegars

3. The “one bite won’t hurt me” mentality can definitely hurt you. This one is tough.... especially on cheat days or holidays. All you want to do is have a tiny glass of wine, a nibble of cheese, or a taste of that chocolate cake, but sadly one bite really can do lots of damage.

Unfortunately dealing with the foods reactions is not dose dependent, meaning that even a little bit of a trigger food will elicit the same response from the immune system as eating a lot of it. You can’t be a little pregnant- it’s an all-or-nothing proposition.

Many people with eczema know they have one or more foods they shouldn’t be eating like gluten, grains, dairy, nuts, corn, soy, fish, shellfish, or eggs. But consuming small amounts of allergenic or sensitizing foods (knowingly or unknowingly) can cause an immune reaction that will flare up your eczema.

Most of my patients don’t notice it at first, but once they connect the dots and start to see that the girls night out last Friday is triggering a wicked flare up by Wednesday, they can finally start to take control of this common mistake.

You should make a conscious effort to avoid trigger foods while you’re in a flare and while you’re healing. This means being diligent with reading labels and asking restaurants about cooking methods and preparation, as these are subtle ways you may be getting exposed to something your body views as a danger and responds accordingly with a reaction.

4. Medications may not be helping as much as you think. This is a more inconspicuous trigger for most people since they’re generally taking a medication to help them in some way. There are two significant ways that medications act as a trigger for eczema.

The first way meds can trigger flares is through the use of fillers, additives, binders and excipients that are used to make the medication. These can be hidden sources of gluten, dairy, pork, rice, potato, corn or nightshades (tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, peppers, etc.). Always be sure to ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if your medications are free of any potential triggers as the label names and ingredients don’t reveal their sources.

In my client population, thyroid and diabetes medications are the most common offenders. [This website](#) is a great resource dedicated to keeping the public aware of gluten in medications.

You should check on your supplements too, however label transparency here is more common. High quality practitioner level supplements often have a list of potential allergens that they are free of. Be careful though as they are typically free of the “major allergens”. Rice will sometimes appear in the ingredient list and most vitamin C is derived from corn or fungi (mold).

The second major source of flare ups is due to the activity of the medication. Some medications damage the lining of the gut, alter the balance of the good bugs in your body (a.k.a. your microbiome), or block the activity of the an important enzyme called DAO which helps your body breakdown histamine.

Here's a list of medications that commonly trigger my patients flare ups:

- Antibiotics
- Birth control pills and some steroidal hormone based medications
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen, naproxen sodium, aspirin, indomethacin)
- Antidepressants (Cymbalta, Effexor, Prozac, Zoloft)
- Immunomodulators/Biologics (Humira, Remicade, Enbrel, Plaquenil)
- Heart Medications (certain beta blockers such as propranolol and metoprolol, and calcium channel blockers such as Norvasc and Cardizem)
- Antihistamines (Claritin, Allegra, Zyrtec, Benadryl)
- Proton pump inhibitors (Prilosec, Nexium, Prevacid)
- Histamine (H₂) blockers (Axid, Tagamet, Pepcid, Zantac)

5. Probiotics could be causing more harm than good. These beneficial bacteria and yeast are highly publicized as being great for health, and they often are, but the key is choosing the right one at the right time. We've all heard about the person that's taken a probiotic and is cured of _____ (insert: eczema, acne, diarrhea, constipation, etc.). Truthfully, these cases are very rare.

Here are some of the major problems:

- Too much of a good thing. You may be taking a probiotic dose that is too high. Some products on the market now have up to 450 billion organisms per dose. That could overwhelm an imbalanced gut and immune system.
- Too many strains in one formula. Now that there are so many different strains and combinations of probiotics on the market it can be difficult to identify which one (or more) you're reacting to.
- Some strains produce histamine. Certain strains of the Lactobacillus species (specific groups of bacteria) are known to produce histamine. The two types of Lactobacillus with the most research behind them are L. casei and L. bulgaricus. If you have histamine intolerance or react to histamine containing foods, then you might want to avoid lactobacillus containing probiotics until you're healed.

- Your gut isn't ready for change. If you have significant food sensitivities, dysbiosis, GI infections, or inflammation in the gut you may react badly to any probiotic. Pushing a compromised gut too fast can result in increased symptoms such as eczema, rashes, bloating, gas, diarrhea, and constipation among others.

6. Fats- too many bad fats, not enough good ones. Fat has had a long reputation as a foe, but in more recent years it's well documented that it's definitely a friend- especially to our skin. The technical term for fat is lipid and we have several types in our skin including cholesterol, sebum, and fatty acids that form the protective barrier. If your barrier is compromised you're more prone to dry, red, irritated skin and eczema.

The standard American diet is imbalanced in its fat ratio- having too many omega 6 fatty acids (bad ones), which are more pro-inflammatory, and too few omega 3 fatty acids (good ones) which are anti-inflammatory. Think about it this way- eating lots of fast food, potato chips, candy, and boxed foods are really going to promote inflammation. Even places you wouldn't suspect it like canola, soybean, and sunflower seed oil, which sound healthy, can raise your omega 6s and keep that flare going.

Keeping your ratio of omega 3:6 between 1:1 - 2:1 is a good goal. Maintaining this ratio supports healthy cells, skin, and inflammatory balance which are essential for taming eczema.

Fatty fish such as wild salmon, sardines, cod, anchovies, trout, tuna, and halibut are rich sources—but be careful if you're having histamine issues. Grass-fed beef is another healthy animal option. Good vegetarian sources of omega-3 can be found include walnuts, flaxseed, linseed, pumpkin, chia and hemp.

7. Bad bugs are invading your gut. Your microbiome is an essential component of who you are and is composed largely of bacteria, archaea, fungi, and viruses. There are trillions of microorganisms living within you. In fact, there are 10 times more bacteria than cells in your body! The vast majority of them reside within your GI tract and on your skin. They have coexisted with us for millennia and are beneficial, helping you thrive by assisting in digesting and absorbing foods, producing vitamins and short chain fatty acids, killing potential pathogens, maintenance of a healthy weight, and supporting detoxification, inflammatory, immune, and hormone function.

These beneficial organisms are vital to your survival, and while most are helpful, some are harmful and cause significant damage to the delicate balance of the ecosystem that exists in your gut and helps regulate so much of your physiology. Dysbiosis occurs when your gut bugs are out of whack. Essentially, the bad bacteria, yeast, viruses, and parasites take over and are winning the war against the good ones.

GI infections and severe imbalances such as small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) are a significant cause of dysbiosis.

Some of the more common pathogenic organisms that cause infection are:

- Bacteria: H. pylori, Campylobacter, Salmonella, enterotoxigenic E.coli, Clostridium difficile
- Parasites: Entamoeba histolytica, Blastocystis hominis, Giardia, Cryptosporidium
- Fungi and Mold: Candida, Aspergillus, Cryptococcus, Histoplasma
- Viruses: Adenovirus, Rotavirus, Norovirus

Dysbiosis and GI infections are significant triggers of eczema for many reasons including:

- Compromised barrier function of the gut and skin (leaky gut and leaky skin)
- Production of inflammatory chemicals that cause itching
- Decreased absorption of vitamins and nutrients needed for skin health
- Activation of the immune system perpetuating inflammatory and autoimmune processes

How to Stop Eczema for Good

I hope you stop as many of these triggers as you can this week.

If you do, you should see improvements like decreased redness and itching, less oozing from wounds, improved focus, and better mood and sleep.

But it's just the first step. Reversing the symptoms of Eczema is about more than just these seven triggers.

The exact causes of eczema have been highly debated over the years making it difficult to target treatment methods, especially given the many types. That's changing now as a pioneering study published in December of 2014 in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology proved that eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is indeed an autoimmune condition. The investigators identified 2 key immune signaling pathways involved in the inflammatory process of eczema. Another study in 2014 showed that immune cells obstruct the skin barrier and block the skin's immune response.

That's good news and bad news...

The bad news is your body is attacking itself (via the skin).

The good news is that we now know how to stop autoimmune disease.

It has everything to do with the root causes triggering your autoimmune disease in the first place. We turn those off... we stop the Eczema.

Most patients with Eczema have 3-5 common root causes, that if treated, completely stop the skin symptoms.

Here are the 9 common root causes I see:

- Leaky Gut
- Dysbiosis and GI Infection
- Food Allergies and Sensitivities
- Toxins (heavy metals, chemicals, pesticides)
- Stress
- Hormone imbalance
- Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis dysfunction/Adrenal Fatigue
- Nutrient Deficiencies or Excesses
- Hidden Infections (abscesses, cavitations, Lyme, mold)

If you look back at your health history, which common root causes do you have?

It's not uncommon to find GI infections, leaky gut, food sensitivities, hormone imbalances, and nutrient depletions together.

If you'd like to get help identifying the factors making your Eczema symptoms flare, the first step is to book a one hour Eczema Case Review with me where I'll go through your health history to help you narrow down your root causes and formulate a plan to stop the autoimmunity.

This is the first step I take with all of my Eczema patients and the most critical, because once we know which root causes you have, then we'll know the steps you need to take to overcome the symptoms.

[***Click Here to Book Your 1-Hour Eczema Case Review NOW!***](#)

I look forward to working with you.

In good health,

- Dr. Stephanie Davis

Dr. Stephanie Davis, DC, is a passionate clinician and researcher that is committed to educating patients so they can improve their own health. After years of dealing with inadequate treatment of hormone and autoimmune challenges, as well as her husband's Hashimoto's thyroiditis, Dr. Davis was determined to help others do the digging required to identify the root causes and treatments that were not presented to her using a functional medicine approach. She works with clients in a collaborative effort to uncover the details of the root causes- the "what's, when's, where's, why's, and how's," that illustrate each patient's journey and point to solutions. Dr. Davis' education and experience as a microbiologist and researcher give her a unique perspective on patient care and treatment. She currently practices virtually at drstephaniedavis.com and is Director of Research at [Living Matrix](#).



What is Functional Medicine?

Functional Medicine uses cutting edge medical research combined with a holistic, systemic approach to provide a framework for identifying the underlying root causes of disease and biochemical imbalances in the body. Viewing the entire body as whole, knowing that everything is interconnected and any input can have system wide impacts, provides a more effective way to view disease and health. A good analogy for Functional Medicine is to imagine a tree. Functional Medicine looks at the entire tree- trunk, branches, leaves, and roots, where the conventional medical model would view only one branch. This approach allows for imbalances to be addressed at the root cause level using multiple interventions such as diet, sleep hygiene, stress reduction and mitigation, exercise, and targeted therapeutic interventions to achieve healing and health.

Kind words from Stephanie's clients:

“When I first began work with Stephanie, I had many health issues. I had tried various treatments on my own or with other doctors -- none of them had worked. Stephanie restored my health, and today I am free of those original issues. I am so very grateful to her for this! Her extensive knowledge, diagnostic abilities and resources were what I needed. I only wish that I had started working with her sooner.”

Hope H.

“Dr. Stephanie Davis is TERRIFIC!! I would highly recommend her! I have worked with her for one year now and have almost completely resolved my health issues!! We were able to successfully heal my adrenals, improve my sleep, eliminate H. Pylori and yeast overgrowth.

During my work with her, I did an elimination diet to definitively identify beyond a shadow of a doubt all the foods that were still causing me problems. Eliminating all the gluten cross-reactive proteins were key to eliminating my inflammatory symptoms.

I have 30+ years medical training & experience, am a certified nutritional consultant, have read more than 40 health books, and have worked with numerous medical professionals in the past 10 years trying to improve my health, and Stephanie is by far the BEST!!

She is knowledgeable, flexible, respectful, understanding, and will be a steady, reliable, caring partner in finding your best health!!!”

Wendy B.

“I’m so happy I found Stephanie! There are a lot of people offering health advice these days, and I’ve had some training myself, but Stephanie is a stand out. Her science background gives her a deeper understanding of the issues and the interrelatedness of different health problems – and, of course, how best to treat them. I’ve had many, many questions, and she has a complete and thorough answer to every question.

I still remember my very first conversation with Stephanie where she said her approach is “specific and sequential.” I loved that! Test first, then carefully treat each area of concern. And her style is warm, friendly, and caring - which makes every interaction a pleasure. Bottom line, and most important, I’m feeling better than I’ve felt in years!”

Jane M.

“I’ve been working with Stephanie for the last two years. She was recommended to me and I’m so glad she was. With all the improvements made to my health, I wish that I could’ve had her help years ago. Since we started working together I feel like I have control of my health for the first time.

In the past, I worked with traditional MDs who saw my multiple issues as unrelated and provided treatments that did little to help me or in some cases made it worse. When I asked if food could be causing or making my problems worse, I was told a firm no that what I ate had nothing to do with it. Feeling that I wasn’t getting the help I needed, I decided to figure it out on my own. I did have some success which encouraged me to keep going, but I found that I could only take it so far on my own. After meeting Stephanie, she took what I started and dramatically expanded on it. With her help I’ve made significant progress.

I like that she looks at not just the individual symptoms but everything as an interconnected whole. She takes into consideration my health history, my family health history, stress, sleep habits, hormones, activity and exercise levels, and what I eat. Many of my health issues started in childhood, and after decades of little to no help, Stephanie is not just providing me with the answers but giving me effective solutions.”

Pam W.

“I have been feeling much better since taking the plant enzymes, betaine, and multivitamins. My stomach pain has decreased significantly, and I’m so thankful. I’ve lost weight and have felt amazing. I’m really thankful for Stephanie’s knowledge and insight”

Emily M.