

# ADVANTAGE

## Eczema

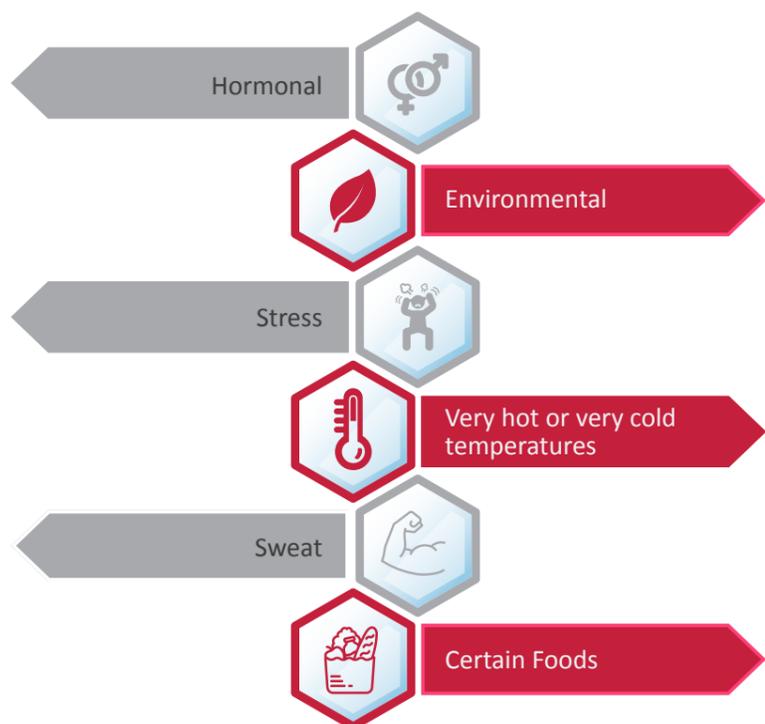
If you have any concerns about whether your plan covers the subject matter discussed in Advantage, please contact your NMG Benefits Healthcare Advisor.

July | 2017

### What is Eczema?



### What causes Eczema?



### How is it diagnosed?

Routine blood tests to exclude other conditions



### How is it treated?

Treatment is guided by your doctor:

- Topical medications such as creams and ointments;
- Oral medications such as antihistamines and steroid.

If infection has occurred the doctor may prescribe antibiotics



## Questions

for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

#### 1 What is eczema?

Eczema, also called atopic dermatitis, is an illness that affects the skin, causing areas of severe itchiness, redness, cracking, and rough patches. It can sometimes lead to blisters that drain fluid. It is a chronic condition that usually starts in childhood and can be a source of significant discomfort. Some people do, however, grow out of it, and it usually becomes less severe as one gets older. It is caused by an abnormal reaction of the immune system, but the environment can also play a role. Eczema is in the same group of conditions as asthma and hay fever. In fact, people who have asthma have a higher chance of also developing eczema, and since there is a genetic component, having a family member with the condition also increases one's risk.

#### 2 What triggers it?

There are a number of irritants or conditions that can trigger an attack, and this varies from person to person. These could include soaps, shampoos, dust, pollen, infections, very hot or very cold temperatures, certain foods, stress, sweat, and hormonal changes. It is clear from this list that for people who have eczema avoiding triggers might not always be easy, but it is helpful to know that an individual patient will not necessarily be susceptible to all types of stimulants.

#### 3 How does it present itself?

It commonly affects the cheeks and scalp in babies and as one gets older, the disease then starts to focus on the neck, wrists, between the buttocks and the creases of the elbows and knees. The skin sometimes hardens and becomes rough from the excessive scratching and dryness and occasionally one can even develop infections of the skin.

#### 4 How is it diagnosed?

While there is no specific blood test for eczema, when you see a doctor for the first time a full physical examination is performed and routine blood tests will be requested. The purpose of this is to exclude other conditions that can look like eczema. A full family history will also be taken, and it often takes a few visits to the doctor to confirm the diagnosis.

#### 5 What is the treatment?

Since there is no cure, the key to treatment is to identify the trigger so that it can be avoided - but this is not always possible. Often the trigger is something that cannot be avoided. Keeping the skin well hydrated is a very important initial management step. This can be done by long regular baths, and then using moisturizer immediately afterwards. Keep nails short so that when you have an attack of itchiness and have to scratch your skin you don't cause wounds that might get infected. Use mild soaps and detergents with no added perfumes. Lots of topical and oral medications are also available, with these being mainly antihistamines and steroids. These do, however, come with side effects. It is recommended that one must only use these products when directed to do so by a doctor, whether it be a GP, allergy specialist, or dermatologist. For example, prolonged use of topical steroids can lead to thinning of the skin. Infections that develop from open wounds caused by excessive scratching would need to be treated with antibiotics. What is important to know about treatment is that what works for the one patient might not necessarily work for the next, so treatment is tailored to suit specific needs