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Predictors of Early Remission in Atopic Dermatitis

Dr. von Kobyletzky and colleagues publish in this issue of *Acta Dermato-Venereologica* (p. 179–184) an interesting study saying that among 839 children with atopic dermatitis aged 1–3 years, 52% went into remission when studied 5 years later. This is good news for parents of a child with mild eczema; there is a high probability that he/she will only have symptoms for approximately 3–5 years.

The predictors for early remission were: a) mildness of eczema, b) late onset, c) non-flexural lesions, d) no heredity, e) no allergic disease, f) rural living.

The non-predictors for early remission were: a) birth order, b) gender, c) parental smoking, d) breast feeding, e) antibiotic use, f) day-care attendance, g) bedroom flooring with PVC coating, h) birth weight, i) socioeconomic status, j) age of house.

Are there any caveats to the study? Yes, many:

1. Diagnosis by questionnaire. This will always lead to a higher incidence of "eczema", and other studies have shown that a questionnaire diagnosis is often twice that of a clinician's diagnosis especially by a dermatologist. The fact that non-flexural lesions were predictive of early remission supports this – infants have many types of rashes for a wide variety of reasons.
2. Is eczema really over at 5 years of age – even though you have had a rash-free period of 12 months? Pro-

bably not. I recently made the following observation: Within one week 3 teenage girls came with a very pronounced flare of atopic eczema telling me that they had not had eczema for years. We discussed what could be the eliciting factor – and all had had vaccinations with Gardasil®. We tried to perform a study on this, but the general practitioners did not care to distribute our questionnaire, so we had to give it up. But, – if you meet a young teenage girl with a flare of atopic eczema – after several years without eczema – ask them about Gardasil vaccination. These girls should definitely have the vaccination, but it can possibly elicit a flare of eczema. Anything that stimulates the immune system in an atopic eczema person may elicit eczema.

3. Once atopic – always atopic? Yes, to a certain extent: Dry skin will often develop during the winter season and there is a strong risk for development either of toxic-irritant contact dermatitis or pompholyx (recurrent vesicular eczema of the palms).

Still, the study published on p. 179–184 is reassuring. We can tell parents that atopic eczema is not a "life-sentence", but a controllable disease which in most children will disappear as they grow older.

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