



## **Eczema getting you down?**

# **Time to recharge your resilience**

**Living with eczema can be a rollercoaster ride.**

Living with an incurable, long-term condition isn't easy. Beyond the physical discomfort – and despite your very best efforts caring for your skin – eczema can be frustrating, thankless, exhausting and all-consuming.

But what if there was a way to improve your ability to cope with these challenges?

## **Introducing resilience**

Resilience is our ability to navigate adversity and still function successfully – both physically and psychologically. It's the core strength we use to manage what life throws at us.

To be clear, resilience is not about being stoic and simply putting on a brave face. Nor does it eradicate negative feelings or eliminate stress.

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What it can do, though, is put you in a better position to cope with the challenges you're facing, so you don't feel so overwhelmed, helpless and at the mercy of eczema.

It's about living successfully alongside eczema – not having your whole life defined by it.

## How do you build resilience?

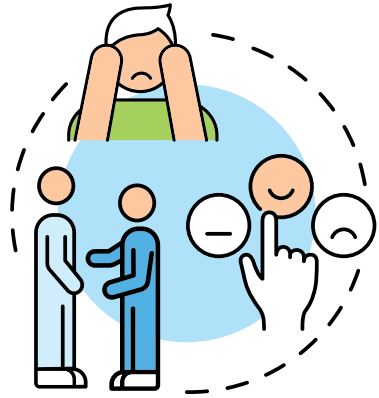
We aren't born resilient – it's a skill that we develop. Our resilience levels aren't static, either. We can grow them over time, as the process is ongoing. So, how can you hone your resilience skills? Here are some suggestions that might help:

### > **Building resilience in yourself**

**Practice acceptance** Focusing your time and energy on the unfairness of having eczema won't improve your quality of life. It's not easy, but try reframing your outlook to focus on what you can do that you love, rather than things you can't do, or only with difficulty. This will help you to focus on the world beyond your condition and your own particular talents and strengths.



**Reach out** Resilience isn't about struggling on your own. It's being able to reach out to family, friends or other people living with eczema and drawing on their experience, insight and support. Things always seem bleaker when it feels like it's just you against the world. Gather people around you to help when things get tough.



### **Focus on what you can control**

Eczema is, by its very nature, unpredictable – calm one day, raging the next. That's true no matter how well you adhere to your treatment regime, avoid your triggers and try not to scratch. So, it's easy to slip into thinking 'What's the point?' But it's important to remember that your actions do have a positive impact on your skin, even though it might not always seem that way, and that keeping going will help ensure more good days in the future.

**Stock up** Give your body the resources it needs to help manage stress: proper nutrition, lots of hydration, regular exercise, rest and relaxation, and sufficient sleep. Whether you have eczema yourself or care for someone who does, this can be challenging – especially

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during flare-ups. But resilience is not about being perfect. Do the best you can in a difficult situation to build up your reserves and you'll feel the benefits.

**Challenge your go-to thinking** If your normal response to adversity is to focus on everything that's ever gone wrong in your life rather than the current challenge, it's time to break the cycle. Being resilient means being able to focus on the here and now and taking a calm, measured approach to steadying the ship. Equally, if your normal response is to shut yourself away, make a conscious effort to reach out.

**Foster positivity** Even at the worst of times, each of us has something, or someone, in their life that they can be grateful for. Journaling, meditation and mindfulness can all help shine a light on the positive aspects of life to counterbalance the negative emotions we may sometimes feel towards our condition. These techniques help us see our lives through a different, non-eczema, lens and believe in a better tomorrow.

**Set goals** It might feel as though all your time, focus and effort goes into managing your eczema – but there's more to you than your skin. Identify one or two non-eczema related goals and then do something every day, week or month that moves you closer to them. It's about making eczema part of the picture – not the whole picture.

**Be flexible** You can have the most detailed and comprehensive plan in the world, but it won't stop eczema throwing a curve ball from time to time. Ploughing on regardless, and pretending nothing's happened, is likely to only

make things harder. Embrace playing things by ear – who knows, the new plan might work out even better than the original one.



**Don't be hard on yourself** Eczema is not a computer game that you have to complete with the highest score! All you can ever do is your best. Some days, that's going to feel like climbing a mountain, even though you aren't a mountaineer. Resilience means having a bad day, then picking yourself up the next day and starting again. It's about not focusing on taking a step backwards but concentrating on how many steps forward you've already taken this year.

### Building resilience in children

All the above suggestions can be helpful for children as well as adults, but if you're a parent or carer there are specific things you can do to help.

**Recognise that you're a role model** If the child sees you struggling to cope with their eczema, they will struggle

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too. It's not always easy – especially when frustration kicks in – but try to model what resilience looks like in practice.

**Self-esteem is everything** A child needs to know there is more to them than their eczema and to understand their strengths and capabilities. It's important to focus on what they can do, not their limitations, and to make sure they don't feel any less valued than their siblings or peers.

**Encourage independence** It's natural to want to protect a child, but sometimes they need to learn how to negotiate their way around challenges themselves, to develop their own coping skills. Experiment with stepping back while they work their way through a problem, knowing you can step in if required.

### > **Building resilience in parents and caregivers**

It's not just the person with eczema who has to battle on a daily basis with the condition.

If you look after someone else with eczema, the above tips will be useful for you, but here are some extra ideas to help you boost your own resilience supplies.

**Step away** Trusting someone else to take on your caring role while you have a few hours' respite may feel like a big step – but it's a vital one. You cannot pour all of yourself into the role of parent or carer and still expect to perform to the best of your ability all of the

time. You need physical space and headspace to catch your breath.

**Talk about something else** One type of social support involves reaching out to friends and family when you're struggling with eczema. Another is meeting up with them and simply enjoying yourself. Ban all talk of eczema for a night and remember who you are beyond emollients, treatments and medical appointments. Spend time with people who inspire you, energise you and make you laugh.



## You're already light years ahead!

Remember, as someone used to living with a long-term condition, you're probably already more resilient than you give yourself credit for. Using the techniques in this article will only enhance your strengths and leave you better able to cope with the challenges ahead.

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