**London Marathon 2017**

**If you’re inspired to take part in next year’s London Marathon**, we still have 5 gold bond places available to runners who are prepared to raise £1,500 or more, to support our work in return for a guaranteed spot on the start line. To register your interest, phone Christina on 07724 655070 or email cvowles@eczema.org for further details.

*My finish time was as I had anticipated – 4 hours 30 minutes. Not close enough to my personal best (4 hours 6 minutes) but okay considering my training didn’t go entirely according to plan. It was surprisingly hot too – not what was forecast! – and that makes a big difference.*

*I would advise anyone with the chance to run the London Marathon to do it. It’s an experience you will never forget. It’s hard and requires huge commitment – not just from you, but your family too while you put in the hours of training – but you won’t regret it. My wife and brother have both put in for 2018 so I have inspired others!*  

*In contrast, Spencer was running his first-ever London Marathon.*

‘Leading up to the day I was nervous, even though I had run the Paris Marathon the previous year, but this was London.’

‘Joining the start line was great. Everyone talks to each other like you are old friends. My heart was racing with both nerves and excitement. I saw my wife Anita and my son Joshua in the crowd at miles 13 and 22, along with my sister-in-law Helen and niece Gabriella. Along the route I met so many friends of the family and others from my gym, and that gives you a buzz and a much-needed lift. I made a point of hugging or high fiving all I saw!’

‘The atmosphere was overwhelming over the whole course, but especially towards the end, so much so that the last 2½ miles were amongst the quickest I ran the whole race.’

‘I’d seen the finish line on the TV so many times that I knew the last 200m off by heart. My heart started beating louder, there were tears in my eyes and I was wearing the biggest smile I’ve ever had on my face when I’ve been running. ‘In the end, my time was 4 hours 51 minutes, which was an hour quicker than my first marathon in Paris and 9 minutes quicker than I was aiming for – so I was over the moon.’

**On behalf of all this year’s NES runners, thank you to everyone who has not only sponsored each of their 26 miles on the day but also supported them during the training process.**

And for anyone considering taking part next year, Spencer has these final words.

‘Trust me, the feeling is like no other you will ever experience. It’s so special and you become part of history forever. Plus – that medal is AWESOME.’

**Such stuff as dreams are made on: eczema-friendly bedding**

Poor sleep patterns are all too common in eczema and the night-time itch can be a torment. For this edition, we asked supporters on our Facebook page to share their top tips for eczema-friendly bedding. Alice Lambert, our Director of Services, reports on their suggestions.

Given the amount of time we spend in bed throughout our lifetimes – the average Briton spends 17 years and 41 days asleep – it makes sense to think carefully about our bedding choices. That said, faced with the dizzying array of products available, it can be difficult to know which to choose – especially when you have to take eczema into account.

Natural or synthetic materials, duvets or blankets, high tog or low tog, spring or no-spring mattresses….

People with eczema are prone to experiencing sleep problems due to the dreaded itch–scratch cycle, which can keep them awake and affect partners’ sleep too. It’s worth considering whether your bedding is inadvertently making you itchier and contributing to poor sleep. It’s also important to bear in mind that, unfortunately, there is no ‘magic bullet’ for eczema. What works for one person won’t necessarily work for another. However, there are actions you can take and products you can use to maximise your chances of an itch-free night.

**Triggers to be aware of**

The body’s temperature control mechanism is often flawed in eczematous skin, and overheating is common. For many people, sweat is also a trigger. Bedding that leads to overheating will encourage itchiness and many of us scratch most during the night. It’s advisable to use thin cotton blankets or a lighter duvet, so check the number of ‘togs’ – the units of thermal resistance in textiles. A lower tog rating (e.g. 1.5–4.5) indicates that it’s light weight. In the colder months, you might prefer to use two low-tog duvets and remove one if you become too hot. For most people with eczema, memory foam mattresses are probably best avoided as they are designed to react to the heat of your body and mould to your shape, thereby reducing the circulation of air and making you feel warm.

Some people’s eczema is triggered by house-dust-mite droppings. If you are sensitive to these droppings, cutting down on dust in the home can help as droppings are contained within dust. House-dust mites thrive in humid conditions and, unsurprisingly, they are found in the largest numbers in mattresses and other bedding, which contain a good supply of their main food source: flakes of skin. In order to cut down on house-dust-mite droppings, wash bed linen regularly – if possible, at least twice a week – and pillows and duvets every 4–6 weeks at 60°C. Tumble drying on a hot setting will also help to destroy house-dust mites. Washing bedding regularly is important for getting rid of treatment residue, too. Give the mattress a thorough vacuuming whenever you change the bedding.

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Whatever type of mattress you choose, they aren’t designed to last for ever and house-dust-mite droppings will inevitably build up. Manufacturers recommend that we change our mattresses every 8–10 years. While they obviously have an interest in our doing so, if you or your child has eczema, buying a
new mattress can be a good investment. In particular, new babies (with or without eczema) should always have a new cot mattress and, if possible, buy a new mattress when your child graduates to a bed.

**HIS DARK MATERIALS**

Bedding made from many different kinds of materials is on offer nowadays – varieties of cotton, silk, bamboo, microfibre, wool – and, where duvets and pillows are concerned, there is both the covering material and filling to think about. First, it’s important to be aware of thread counts. A thread count relates to the number of threads (width and length) that make up an inch of woven fabric, and tells us how closely woven the fabric is. A typical, inexpensive sheet might have a count of 150, whereas more expensive bedding might have a 500-count. Generally, the higher the thread count, the softer and cooler the sheet, and the more likely it will wear well over time.

**Cotton**

Many of our Facebook users strongly recommend using bedding made from 100% cotton, which is soft, cool, absorbs sweat and allows the skin to ‘breathe’. Duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets are all available in 100% cotton. It is even possible to buy duvets filled with synthetic material.

**Bamboo**

With a texture similar to silk, bamboo bedding is more absorbent than cotton, soft and highly effective at regulating temperature, keeping the user cool in summer and warm in winter. Bamboo can be confusing – it appears in different guises in product information: 100% bamboo viscose/rayon, 100% bamboo lyocell, bamboo blend with cotton and bamboo linen. Most bamboo bedding is the viscose variety. While the processing of bamboo viscose is chemical-intensive, this material contains the aforementioned properties that make bamboo attractive to people with eczema. In terms of environmental friendliness, bamboo linen and lyocell are the better choices. The following products are available in bamboo fabric: duvets (including bamboo-filled, bamboo-covered duvets), duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets, plus duvet, pillow and mattress protectors. A disadvantage of bamboo is that it doesn’t tolerate high temperature washing too well – users are recommended to wash bamboo bedding at temperatures of up to 40°C, which is insufficient to kill house-dust mites or remove emollient residue effectively.

**Silk**

Silk is a traditionally luxurious and glamorous material, but does it help with eczema? Silk is a natural product, is ‘breathable’ and, like bamboo, is excellent at temperature regulation. It also provides an inhospitable environment for house-dust mites, which bodes well for eczema sufferers. The following products are available in silk: duvets (including silk-filled, silk-covered duvets), silk-filled pillows, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets. A disadvantage of silk is that sheets and covers can only be washed at low temperatures (30°C), and silk-filled duvets and pillows can only be spot cleaned and professionally laundered.

**Wool**

Surprisingly, perhaps, wool should be considered an option for people with eczema because of its temperature-regulating properties and dry, house-dust-mite-resistant environment. Wool-filled duvets and pillows, and wool beds and mattresses are all available. A disadvantage of wool, as with some of the other materials, is that some products are only machine washable at 30°C on a delicate or wool cycle with special wool detergent, and some can be dry cleaned only. It’s advisable for parents to check that babies aren’t allergic to lanolin before trying wool bedding.

**TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF MATTRESSES**

Mattresses are a big investment, so it’s worth trying out potential candidates in the shops first. If your current mattress is in good condition but you are worried it’s exacerbating your eczema, try using a mattress protector in 100% cotton, bamboo or silk over the mattress, underneath a sheet made from one of those materials, and see if that makes a difference. Be aware that some ‘mattress protectors’ do not completely encase the mattress; these are usually called ‘mattress toppers’. It’s best to use one that does. If you are looking for protection from house-dust mites, though, you need to find mattress and pillow protectors that stop the mites in their tracks. It’s vital that the covers encase the mattress or pillow, but they won’t be 100% cotton and could well be tightly woven synthetic material such as polyester. They should be labelled to specify what they are effective against – house-dust mites, cat allergens, moulds, etc. Do not buy something that is vaguely labelled ‘anti-allergy’.

There are three main types of mattress: innerspring, foam and bladder (air and waterbeds). The inner cavity of innerspring mattresses creates an incubator for house-dust mites where their droppings and our dead skin cells accumulate. These mattresses should be avoided where possible. As mentioned above, memory foam mattresses are also not ideal as they can lead to overheating.

An alternative type of foam mattress is latex. Natural latex is resilient and resistant to house-dust mites, mould and mildew. Latex mattresses tend to be more expensive than other mattresses, but also last longer. Because of the processes they undergo during their production, latex mattresses are usually safe for people with latex allergies, especially those who suffer from localised skin reactions or minor respiratory problems when exposed to medical-grade latex. But if you have a known latex allergy or sensitivity, check with your doctor to discuss risk factors before sleeping on a latex mattress.

Buying new bedding can be daunting, and you may need to experiment with different materials before finding one that suits you. It’s possible that minor adjustments to your bedding arrangements (e.g. introducing protectors/encasements, carrying out more regular washes of bedding at hot temperatures), could make a positive difference, so it’s worth trying these before undertaking a wholesale change of all bedding products. It’s also important to keep up with your regular skin-care routine while trialling new products. Please let us know if there are any products or materials that have worked particularly well for you.

Good luck, and sweet dreams!
We are family

Mum of three, Katie Fiszman, shares her experience of family life with eczema.

When I was little I used to spend hours awake in the middle of the night trying to soothe myself. The itch was so overpowering that I would often take a hairbrush to my skin and brush it until it was raw and bleeding. I rarely talk about such memories because I’m ashamed of them, but the truth is that I used to open the door to allow some light into the room so I could watch the flakes of skin fall from my arms onto the deep red carpet, while pretending they were tiny snowflakes. Sometimes I would lift my arms above my head while I scratched letting the ‘snowflakes’ fall onto my face and eyelashes.

It’s fair to say that, as a child, I was well and truly trapped in the addictive itch-scratch cycle. As a parent of children with eczema, and after decades of learning to manage my own condition, I can now look back on my childhood and recognise some of the triggers that – at the time – went unidentified, including:

**Poor diet:** I remember as a child eating a lot of frozen ready meals – freshly cooked meals were something of a rarity in our house – as well as crisps and chocolate, and not keeping hydrated enough. I have since become more attuned to what my body craves in terms of nutrition – plenty of vegetables (raw and cooked), fish, grains and fruit. I don’t completely rule out less healthy food, but I do try to make sure that 90% of what I eat has real nutritional value.

**Bath-time routine:** as a child I would wash my hair and body while sitting in the soapy water, exposure to which I now realise was disastrous for my eczema. The result of all of the above was constant itching, painful wounds on my arms and legs and, of course, the feeling of shame associated with the whole situation. I vividly remember when I was 12 years old a relative confronting me about some laundry of mine, which was stained with blood, that she had seen in the basket. Even now it makes me feel extremely sad to think of it.

Over the years I became used to the ebb and flow of eczema. That is the nature of the condition though – forever lying in wait, flaring up when you least expect it. However, using topical steroids to treat flares would buy

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**USEFUL WEBSITES**

Please note that – where multiple websites are listed below – not every website contains every product listed above it. Also, look carefully at the information about a product’s material. Unless a material is explicitly stated to be 100% cotton (for example), then it’s not.

100% cotton bedding – blankets, duvets, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets, plus duvet, pillow and mattress protectors:

**Allergy Best Buys**
https://www.allergybestbuys.co.uk/products/cellular-blanket

**Allersafe**
https://www.allersafe.co.uk/cottonfresh/b31

**Greenfibres**

**M&S**
https://www.marksandspencer.com/s/home-and-furniture/bed-linen

**Pure Living Collection**
www.purelivingcollection.com/cotton-duvet.html

**The Duet Store**
https://www.theduvestore.co.uk/index.php/Luxury-Sheets-Duvet-Covers-Pillow-Cases-View-all-products.htm

**The Fine Cotton Company**
www.thefinecottoncompany.com/luxury-bed-linen-bed-linens-and-duvet-covers-collections

**John Lewis**
https://www.johnlewis.com/search?Ntt=silk%20duvet&Nty=1

**Pure Living**
www.purelivingcollection.com/mulberry-silk-duvet.html

**Wool bedding – wool-filled duvets, pillows, mattress protectors, mattresses and beds**

**The Wool Company**
https://www.thewoolcompany.co.uk/luxury-bedding.html

**Wool Room**
www.thewoolroom.com/bedding/

**Silk bedding – duvets, pillows, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets**

**Gingerlily**
https://www.gingerlily.co.uk/silk-bed-linen, http://www.gingerlily.co.uk/silk-bed-linen

**Latex pillows and mattresses**

**Greenfibres**
https://www.greenfibres.com/product-category/uk/bamboo-bed-sheets/

**The Wool Room**
www.thewoolroom.com/bedding/

**John Lewis**
https://www.johnlewis.com/search?Ntt=latex-sense/latex-mattresses/c54

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