

Preet's story: Living with eczema

Meet Preet Bhogal, a CSPA Board member with eczema.

Interviewed by Christine Janus

Please tell us about yourself and your history with eczema.

My name is Preet Bhogal. I was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and now live in Ottawa. I was diagnosed with eczema as an infant and was hospitalized several times as a child. It was rough.

How does eczema affect your daily life?

It influenced my everyday life a lot more when I was younger, but now it's only an issue if I'm having a flare. However, it affected my family drastically when I was a child. Now it's something I manage on my own.

How does it affect your personal relationships?

When I was younger, especially during my adolescent years, my eczema had a significant impact. You spend so much energy worrying about what people think when you're young. I would distance myself and hide because I was so insecure. As an adult, however, it doesn't alter my relationships much. Having eczema is just a simple fact of my life.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of comments about your condition?

I do have memories of people not being very nice when I was younger. A kid at school once said I had "old-man hands." And some adults believed I was contagious. Now my eczema isn't very obvious. In fact, most people are surprised to learn that I have eczema.

Give us some tips for effective management.

I've been living with eczema for three decades, so I've learned a lot over the years. My options have expanded thanks to research and new treatments, but the best advice I ever got was when my dermatologist said to just "see what works."

What steps do you take to manage your condition?

I'm very careful with soaps, detergents and skin products. I've learned by trial and error. I always stay up to date with a prescription for my medicated cream. When it's extremely hot, staying indoors with air conditioning helps. I'm aware of my diet and try to avoid stress because that is my biggest trigger.

Which resources out there are most helpful?

The Eczema Society of Canada is great, as is the CSPA website. I have learned a lot online, and especially by talking to other patients. My dermatologist is there in case of complications.

What kinds of support help you most?

As a kid I did meet others with similar problems, but it was always at the hospital or a camp for kids with skin conditions. Meeting other patients who are out there living life (and thriving) with a skin condition has taught me to be a lot more comfortable with myself and in my own complicated skin.

Have you ever wished for more support?

More support in terms of related mental health issues would have been helpful. Eczema causes a lot of emotional scars, along with the physical. The eczema might not be a pressing concern in my life at this point, but it has shaped my life more than anything else.

What would you like people to know about being an eczema patient?

To those who don't believe eczema is *that* serious a problem, try to understand how much having a skin condition affects someone's life. And to other skin patients, I would say don't hide your skin. Learn about your condition and what works. Talk to other patients and your dermatologist. See yourself as a person brimming with potential. Don't let the disease define you. 

Reaching out and meeting other eczema patients allows you to share and receive tips and valuable experiences. Get support today. Help yourself and others. Visit www.skinergy.ca/eczema or see page 21 to learn more about the Eczema Society of Canada.