



MY ECZEMA

ACTION PLAN



Your Step-by-Step Guide to Managing Eczema



MY ECZEMA ACTION PLAN

This book belongs to:



My Doctor's Name:

My Doctor's Phone No.:

Emergency Contact Name:

Emergency Contact Phone No.:

Editorial development by Apple Heart. Medical consultation by Dr Leong Kin Fon. This book is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Only your doctor can diagnose and treat a medical problem.

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THERE IS HOPE!



You were not bitten by mosquitoes or any other insects but your skin becomes very itchy. The itch seems to come from underneath your skin. You can hardly stand it and so your first reaction is to scratch. What a relief when you scratch. But red rashes pop up and sometimes some unsightly and uneven bumps appear on your skin. Now your skin looks fiery red, rough and there are also fingernail marks of your scratches. You want to hide all of them.

Then all of sudden, the itch returns, and this time it's worse than before! You scratch again and the vicious cycle continues until your skin begins to bleed. All these can make you feel helpless and lost. Don't worry; there are ways to help you overcome them.

You may like to know that you are not alone with such skin disorder. In fact, millions of people around the world suffer from eczema. About one out of five children is affected by eczema at certain stages of their lives!

This guide book will give you relevant information about what is going on under your skin. Why do you itch? What can you do to prevent the itch in the first place?

What can you do to have a good night's sleep? And best of all, how you can take charge of your life by managing this skin disorder effectively.

Eczema rashes come and go. Learn how to use the 'traffic light colours' in the 'My Eczema Action Plan' so that you can apply the right action steps to managing the flare-ups.

I always tell my young patients and little friends that having eczema is like running a long-distance marathon. You may not immediately find a medication that works for you. However, don't give up hope just yet. Continue to run your race. Eventually, you will find one treatment that will work for you.

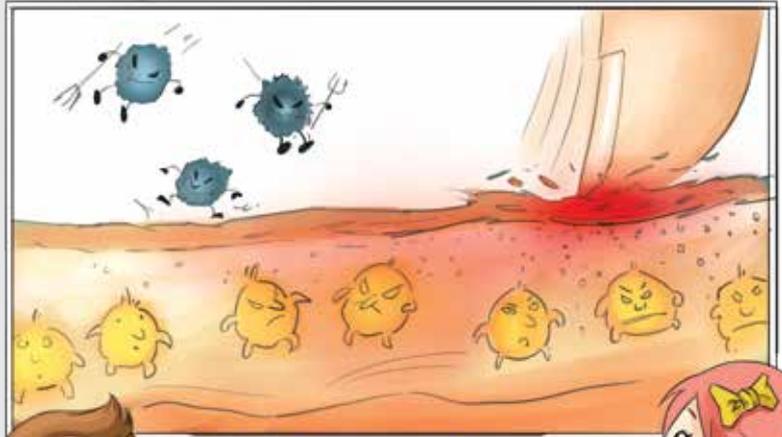
With time and good skin care habits, you can outgrow eczema. And, the best thing is that you are not alone in this marathon. You have all of us to cheer you on – your parents, your doctor and your teachers. So read on and find out what you can do to start managing your skin's condition today! You will win the race!

Dr Leong Kin Fan

CONSULTANT PAEDIATRIC
DERMATOLOGIST

THE ECZEMA STORY

You know it better than most people: eczema can be a nightmare for you and your parents. It affects your daily activities and even prevents you from having a good night sleep.



WHAT IS ECZEMA?

Eczema is characterised by these two easily identified symptoms: rashes and extreme itching. Your skin becomes extremely dry and it begins to itch. The urge to scratch can become intolerable. When you scratch, the skin breaks and becomes a target for infection.

This then triggers the release of inflammatory chemicals and your skin becomes inflamed, which further irritates the skin. This results in a vicious itch-scratch-infection-inflammation cycle.



WHY DO YOU HAVE ECZEMA?

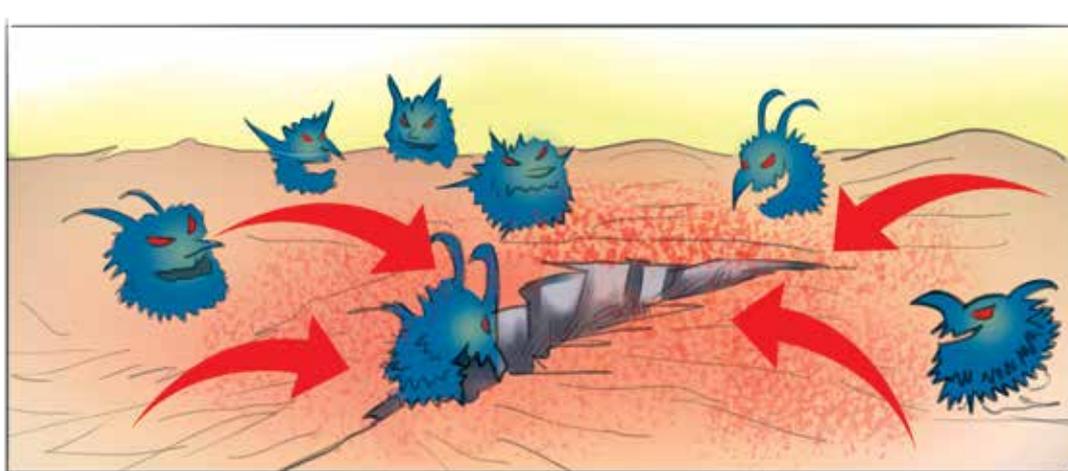
There is no exact cause of eczema, but doctors think that it is a type of allergy that runs in the family. Your chances of getting eczema are also higher when someone in your family has asthma, rhinitis or hay fever. Eczema is a multi-factorial disease. It can be triggered by things in the environment or certain habits that can make your itching and rashes worse.

It is not your fault that you have eczema. Nothing you or your parents did or didn't do cause you to get eczema. You're not unclean or condemned. You cannot pass eczema to someone else – it is not contagious. Do not despair because you and many who suffer from eczema can relieve your eczema symptoms with certain proven strategies which you will find on [PAGE 6](#).

WHEN YOU SCRATCH...

Your skin helps prevent the 'bad guys' like dirt, germs and chemicals from entering your body to cause you harm. In order for your skin to function well, it needs to be flexible and moist. For your skin to do its job well, the skin surface cannot be broken. That is why

you shouldn't be scratching. The more you scratch, the worse the eczema rash becomes. The way to prevent scratching is to avoid triggers that irritate and cause your skin to itch, burn, dry out or turn red.



COMMON TRIGGERS:

- A sudden change in climate.
- Heat, perspiration.
- Strong soaps, bubble baths, laundry detergents.
- Pets, carpets, stuffed toys.
- Nylon, acrylic, wool and other rough fabrics.
- Fragrance, including lotions, talcum powder, perfumes and air freshener.
- Tobacco smoke, campfire smoke.
- Fever caused by infections.
- House dust mites/ dusty environments.

NASTY INFECTIONS

When the 'bad guys' enter through the wound, your skin becomes infected and may take a longer time to heal. Consult your doctor immediately if you notice any of the symptoms listed below:

- Skin feels warmer and more tender than usual.
- The part of the skin has turned red or darker in colour.
- Skin may have bumps that ooze out a yellowish fluid.
- There may be an unpleasant odour.

TEAMING UP WITH YOUR DOCTOR

You and your doctor are a team – you both want to keep this eczema under control. So, you should be open and honest when you talk to him about your skin condition. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Your doctor will be glad to know that you are playing an active role in managing your skin disorder.

DIAGNOSING ECZEMA

Eczema is also known as the 'itch that rashes' as the itch comes before the rash. Your skin usually starts to itch before a rash appears. It is not until after you scratch your skin that the rash surfaces. The more you scratch, the worse the rash will become. When this happens, you should consult your doctor as soon as possible. He will look at your skin and ask some questions. Your doctor will be able to tell whether you have eczema based on a clinical examination. If you have eczema, he will give you a proper treatment plan to make you feel better.

YOUR TREATMENT GOAL

The main objectives in treating eczema is to restore the skin barrier and keep flare-ups to the minimum. Follow the treatment plan provided by your doctor (refer to the next page for more details). On your own, try to identify the possible triggers of your eczema. You may not be able to avoid the triggers completely, so the key is to strike a balance. For example, going for a swim in a swimming pool is good for your eczema as the chlorine will kill the bacteria on your skin. However, chlorine may irritate your skin. So, after swimming, it is important to take a shower to remove all the chlorine. Remember to moisturise your skin too!



YOUR TREATMENT PLAN

To help you in managing your eczema, your doctor will provide you with a treatment plan. This will include a few, several or all of the medications listed on this page. Your treatment plan will usually include anti-inflammatory topical treatments, antibiotics, barrier repair, Controller Cream and antihistamines. These medications should be taken as prescribed.

Do not discontinue, or alter the treatment plan without consulting your doctor.



TREATMENT FOR ECZEMA

- **Moisturisers** are applied on the skin so as to keep it from drying out. They make your skin softer and more flexible to prevent cracks and flares.
- **Controller Creams** work in two-ways: hydrate your skin and relieve itching and redness. You can use them on the parts of your skin when they start to itch. Ask your doctor for specialised emollients with anti-infection and anti-inflammatory properties.
- **Steroid** creams and ointments help reduce inflammation and itchiness. This is the first line of treatment to take care of eczema. Your doctor will start you with the mildest strength of steroid cream possible.
- **Antihistamines** help stop itchiness. These are pills or syrups that are taken orally. Some antihistamines may make you sleepy and this is good in helping you sleep well at night.
- **Antibiotics** that treat secondary infections. These can be pills, syrup, or creams and ointments to cut down the amount of bacteria on your skin.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

It may take a long time to find medicines that work for you but don't give up hope. Think of your eczema journey as a marathon race, you will eventually reach the finished line and receive your award.

WHAT IS YOUR COLOUR ZONE TODAY?



Eczema rashes come and go. They may get worse or better during certain time of the day. You can use the 'traffic light' colours to determine your skin condition and then take the appropriate action steps to manage your eczema.

GREEN ZONE: GOOD!

This is a good zone to be in. Your skin looks normal and you have only mild irritation. You can carry on with your daily activities without any complaints. Even though everything is well and seems to be under control, you still need to use your controller-kit. Take showers with a mild cleanser, followed by moisturising your whole body. Complete the treatment by applying Controller Creams on skin areas that tend to itch.

YELLOW ZONE: CAUTION!

When you are in the 'Yellow' zone, you have to be alert. Be especially careful not to expose yourself to known triggers. You will have to continue applying your controller-kit and adding on rescue medicines. Here are some of the warning signs: your skin begins to itch more intensely and red scaly rashes may appear. As a result, you may not be able to function normally. Follow your doctor's orders and start applying rescue medicines on the affected areas.

RED ZONE: DANGEROUS!

If you were to enter this zone, you will need immediate medical consultation. Your eczema flare-up has worsened and the rescue medicines may not be working. There may be yellowish fluid oozing out of your eczema. You may develop a fever or suffer pain in the affected areas. The itch may be so bad that you will not be able to have good night sleep for days. Do not delay, your skin needs urgent help and so consult your doctor immediately!



SHOWER TIME!
FUN TIME!

For every child, shower time should be a fun time! So enjoy! You are getting rid of germs when you shower. All the other things that may irritate your skin will also be washed off. After shower, you smell good too! So, have fun enjoying your shower!



BETTER SHOWERS

- Keep your body clean by taking quick showers 1-2 times every day.
- Spend no more than 10 minutes each time as any longer will wash away your body's natural oils.
- Use lukewarm or cold water, not hot. Hot water may activate the sweat glands and induce redness and itchiness.
- Avoid scented shower creams, bath oils and bubble baths as fragrance may aggravate eczema.
- Use a mild moisturising cleanser to wash the areas where it's needed, then rinse well. Don't use soap as this may remove your skin's natural oils.
- Don't scrub your body with a washcloth as this may irritate your skin.

TIPS

- It's best to use a mild cleanser or soap substitute that is hypoallergenic. Try not to use an antibacterial wash as it may dry your skin.
- If you feel a burning sensation when taking bath, try adding one cup (8-ounce or 237 ml) of table salt to one big pail (6 gallon or 22.7 l) of warm bathwater.
- Pat dry after shower. Don't rub vigorously with a towel as this may trigger an itch reaction.
- Apply moisturiser immediately all over your body. Turn to the following page for more information.
- Always take a shower when you come back from an outing or a game.

MOISTURISE,

MOISTURISE,



MOISTURISE!

A good moisturiser (in cream, lotion or ointment form) helps conserve the skin's natural moisture and prevent it from drying out. This helps decrease itch, flares and infections. Moisturiser also keeps your skin softer and more flexible so it doesn't break open easily. Moisturise your skin adequately and make it part of your daily routine!

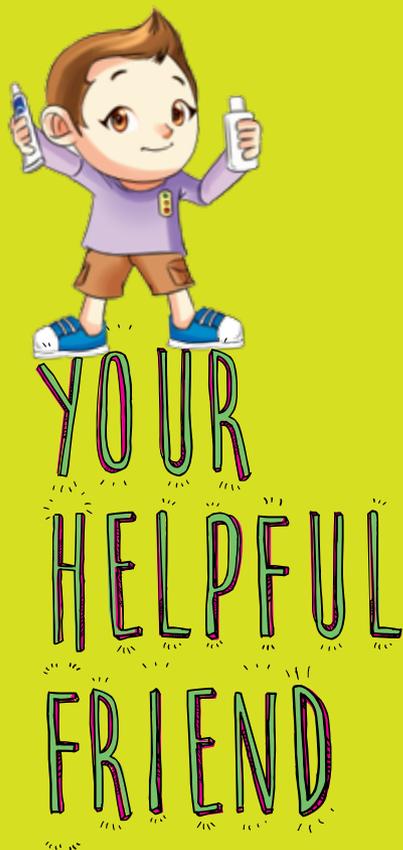
COMMIT TO A ROUTINE

- Moisturise your skin liberally, at least twice a day. If you stick to the same time every day, you'll be less likely to miss it.
- After shower, moisturise your skin immediately, within three minutes. This helps seal in moisture from the bath into the skin – similar to how plastic wraps seal moisture into a cake.
- Play games when you moisturise, either on your own or with your members of your family. Spread and smoothen the moisturiser on in a thick layer, then draw pictures on your special 'skin drawing paper'. Erase by gently rubbing the moisturiser into your skin. Be creative and think of other ways of having fun moisturising.



TIPS

- Use only moisturisers that are fragrance-free, dye-free and paraben-free.
- Remove sweat on skin before moisturising.
- Have a small container of moisturiser handy and bring it with you everywhere you go.



The CONTROLLER CREAM

Sometimes after applying moisturiser lavishly on your whole body, you still feel that there are certain spots on the skin that are mildly irritated. The skin on these areas may look normal but you are feeling the itch. These are the stubborn, itchy spots. This is when 'Controller Cream' comes to your rescue!

FOR STUBBORN, ITCHY SPOTS

- After shower, apply Controller Cream on these stubborn, itchy spots.
- Whenever there's an itch, take a pea-size drop of Controller Cream and apply directly onto the spot. You may reapply as and when you need to.
- Adopt a new habit – instead of scratching the itchy spot (*Itch-Scratch Habit*), just rub it gently with Controller Cream (*Itch-Rub Habit*).
- Controller Cream contains skin-friendly ingredients to help moisturise and promote your skin's natural repair and restoration works. It also helps take care of irritation and inflammation of your skin.

TIPS

- Your immunity in your skin will become stronger with time. So, be patient and keep applying the Controller Cream on those stubborn, itchy spots.
- If your skin hurts, don't rub but gently tap in the Controller Cream. Allow time for the Controller Cream to work. Try to stay with the same brand of Controller Cream. Avoid switching brands unless absolutely necessary.



Your nails protect the sensitive ends of your fingers and toes. Unfortunately, your nails may harm your skin when you start scratching. Your skin may bleed and bacteria may enter your body through the open wound. If you continue scratching, your skin will become thicker and less responsive to treatment. Therefore, always keep your nails short, filed and clean.



LOOKING AFTER YOUR NAILS

- Wash around and under your nails every day.
- Cut your nails regularly with a nail clipper.
- File your fingernails so that there are no sharp edges.
- Use a stronger nail clipper to cut your toenails.
- It is best to trim your nails after a shower because then the nails will be softer and easier to cut.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Choose a time when you want to trim and file your child's nails. Make it a routine. It can be when you are about to trim your own nails or when you snuggle him up in a towel after shower.
- Make it fun by telling him a story or singing him a song as you trim the nails.
- Use distractions like turning on his favourite cartoon programme or giving him his favourite snack or drink.
- Always let your child relate to positive emotions whenever you trim and file his nails.

COMFY CLOTHING



Wearing soft, light cotton clothing is great as this material helps absorb your sweat and does not irritate your skin. Certain fabrics may trigger flare-ups. Avoid wearing tight-fitting clothing as they restrict your movement and their edges may irritate your skin.



WHAT CAN YOU DO

- Wear clothes made of soft and light materials. Cotton clothing is most appropriate.
- Avoid clothes made of fabrics that have stiff fibres, prickly surface or taut texture as these may irritate your skin. Materials to avoid are wool, polyester, nylon or acrylic.
- Remove stiff clothing tags to prevent them from rubbing against your skin.
- Always wash new clothes before wearing.
- Use a dye-free and perfume-free clothes detergent. Make sure your clothes are washed thoroughly to remove any soap residue.



TIPS

- Keep a pair of gloves that are made of cotton or any soft breathable materials. Put them on when you are under stress and having a flare-up to prevent you from hurting your skin. Wear them at night to prevent scratching.
- Wear shoes that are made of leather or some other materials that breathes – not nylon or plastic. Your feet will thank you!

HAVE FUN



INDOOR & OUTDOOR

Have all the fun playing indoor and outdoor games with your friends as long as you learn how to avoid the triggers and allergens that cause flare-ups. Some children are allergic to the grass while others are allergic to dogs and cats. Know your triggers and double up your protection!

DOUBLE UP PROTECTION

- Step out into the sun only after you have used your controller-kit. Leave it on for about 15 minutes and then apply sunscreen to avoid sun burns.
- If possible, protect your skin by covering up with long sleeves and long pants made of soft cotton materials.
- Wipe away sweat immediately.

TIPS

- If you are allergic to pet dander but you can't bear to part with your pet, keep your pet off your bed and other furniture you use. If possible, keep your pet outside.
- If you are allergic to pollen, avoid playing on the grass. Bathe before going to bed to rinse off any pollen that is clinging to your skin or hair.
- If you are allergic to dust mites, remove carpets and curtains from your bed room. Stay away from stuffed toys as these are dust-catchers. Wash your bed sheet and pillow cases every week. If possible, use anti-dust mite covers.



When the weather becomes too hot or too cold, your skin may become irritated. Your skin may also flare up when you move from an extreme temperature to another. For example, when you step into a cold air-conditioned room on a hot and humid day. Extreme temperatures do not agree with your skin. The hot weather causes moisture in your skin to evaporate. The humid weather makes you perspire more and the sweat may irritate your skin. On the other hand, in an extremely cold environment such as an air-conditioned room, your skin may easily dry out and that will trigger flare-ups.



AVOID EXTREME TEMPERATURES

WHAT CAN YOU DO

- Choose a seat that is not near to a window so that your skin will not be affected by the direct sunlight.
- If your skin is beginning to feel itchy and irritated while playing outdoors, get your friends to play with you indoors for a change.
- When you are in the field or a park, try to play under the shade of a tree. Stay out of direct sunlight as much as possible.
- When the weather becomes extremely hot, try to stay indoors within a cool and comfortable environment.
- Wipe away excessive sweats after exposure to heat or any perspiring activities.



ECZEMA RESCUE POUCH

Prepare a pouch or a small bag to store all your essential items that will help take care of any skin irritation and itch. Make sure you always have a supply of wet towel, dry hand towel, a small container of moisturiser and Controller Cream. Carry this 'Eczema Rescue Pouch' with you everywhere you go.

I'M IN THE YELLOW ZONE!

When the skin starts to itch, it's a sign that you may be in the 'Yellow' zone. This happens when you are exposed to a known or unknown trigger. Your skin may start with a mild itch, followed by red and scaly rashes. This is the time to take immediate steps to manage the flare-ups. Go to your 'Flare-Care Centre' immediately. This is a corner either in your bathroom or bedroom where you keep your controller-kit and medicines handy. Start applying your rescue medicine creams and ointments as directed by your doctor.

SETTING UP THE 'FLARE-CARE CENTRE'

Make sure you have a good supply of moisturisers and medicines in the 'Flare-Care Centre'. Keep a clean towel handy so you can pat your skin dry after washing it with a gentle skin cleanser. Decorate this corner with inspirational posters to lift up your spirit as you treat your skin with tender loving care.

TIPS

- Start with your controller-kit so that your skin is moisturised before applying the rescue medicine.
- Hang up pictures of you looking your best so that you are inspired to stick to your treatment.
- Hum or sing your favourite song to relax yourself.
- Think positive and remember the happy days.





FLARE
CARE

Attend to the itchy spot of your skin. Apply controller-kit and add on rescue medicine. Next, take a good look at yourself in the mirror. Check your eyelids and areas around the eye; face; neck area and folded areas

of elbows and knees; arms and legs; thickened areas, palms and soles; and general body area. Look for red and scaly rashes or areas with mild itch. Start applying your rescue medicine creams and ointments.

FOLLOW DOCTOR'S ORDER

What did your doctor tell you to do when you are in the 'Yellow' zone? Refer to the action plan given by your doctor. Apply the rescue medicine on the affected areas as often as you are told to do so.

AREAS	RESCUE MEDICINE	HOW OFTEN/WHEN
Thin skin areas - Eyes		
- Face		
- Neck; folded areas of elbows & knees		
Thick skin areas - General body; arms and legs		
- Palms and soles		

TIPS

- Make skin care part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth when you wake up in the morning. Moisturise your skin immediately after shower – and stick to this routine!
- Make it fun applying moisturiser. Use the cream to create patterns, draw your favourite cartoons or even play tic-tac-toe on your skin.
- Don't be tempted to take days off when your eczema shows signs of improvement. Continue with your skin care routine.
- During stressful times, apply moisturiser more than usual and finish off with controller creams.

WHEN IT BECOMES

Sometimes the itch can become unbearable even though you have done all you needed to do. Here are some tips to help you overcome your urge to scratch.

DAYTIME SCRATCHING

- **Make your hands busy.** Most people start scratching when their hands are not busy doing work. So, always make sure your hands have something fun to do like tapping in the medicine, playing cards or creating handicrafts.
- **Get covered up.** Sometimes when you watch TV, your hands start scratching without you realising it. You can prevent it by putting on long sleeves and pants.
- **Count to 10.** When it gets itchy, take a deep breath and start counting to 10. This will help you focus on a new habit to prevent you from scratching.
- **10-second blow.** Pat or blow gently on your skin for 10 seconds on your skin, then go and do something else. For example, drawing a picture, going for a walk or playing the piano.
- **Use a cold compress.** Put a cold compress onto your skin and count to 10. This will help relieve the itch. Repeat as needed. Alternatively, you can wash your skin under cold running water for a few minutes.



NIGHT TIME STRUGGLES

- **Moisturise your skin.** Apply moisturiser at least 20 minutes before bedtime to allow it to soak in.
- **Get covered up.** Put on baggy pyjamas with long sleeves and long pants. During stressful periods, put on cotton gloves and socks.
- **Take your medication.** Some medicines help you to get a good night rest so that you can be bright and shiny the next morning.
- **Get a naptime massage.** Having a good massage at bedtime can help relax your body and is a useful distraction technique. *Tips for parents: try using a bit of moisturiser on your index fingers as you massage your child's face. Gently rub his back and legs too.*

UNBEARABLE...

- **Cool and airy.** Keep your bedroom cool – not dry – and use cotton sheets or a light, natural-fibre duvet (comforter).
- **Apply wet wraps before bedtime.** Moisten clean gauze bandages with water and wrap the affected skin. Cover the wet bandages with a dry bandage or towel to lock in the moisture, and leave overnight. Apply wet wraps on any part of your body that is especially itchy.



RED ZONE ALERT!

When your eczema flare-up worsens or your medicine is not working, you are in the 'Red' zone. Sometimes, yellowish-fluid may appear. You may develop a fever and pain in your body. Do not wait.

Visit your doctor immediately!



WEEPING ECZEMA



INFECTED ECZEMA



CRUSTING ECZEMA



WIDESPREAD RASH



National Eczema Awareness Month (NEZAM) was initiated in 2014 by the Persatuan Dermatologi Malaysia (PDM) and the Malaysian Paediatric Association (MPA).

This nationwide campaign was created to empower parents, caregivers and patients on the proper management and care of eczema. In 2015, NEZAM introduced two cartoon characters: Nezam and Claire – so as to identify with young patients and help raise their awareness on how to manage their skin condition.



Joint-Initiators

Supported by

