

Health

How Losing 45 Pounds Ended One Woman's Eczema for Good

What's the connection between healthier eating habits and healthier skin? We asked experts to lay it out for us.

Bella Gerard | October 04, 2017



Nicolette Fusco was one of the lucky few who had never struggled with acne, oily skin, or other skin problems that often plague teens and young adults. But three years ago when she was 22, her skin suddenly took an inexplicable turn, and she began to suffer from severe recurrent bouts with the skin condition eczema—an umbrella term for various types of itchy, scaly red rashes that can flare up on any part of the body.

Every summer, the creases of Fusco's arms and legs would become bumpy, red, and dry, and sweat triggered by the hot weather would irritate and inflame the rashes. A visit to a dermatologist didn't turn up any reason for the eczema, but it didn't appear to have any connection to her weight; she carried about 185 pounds on her five-foot-one frame.

"I was so uncomfortable in my own skin," recalls Fusco. "I would have dead skin everywhere; it would fall off of my legs and it would burn." To deal with the eczema, she began covering her body in layers, no longer comfortable in shorts or other clothing that might expose the bumps to those around her.

Fusco's eczema would continue to plague her for two more years. But in fall 2016, she decided to address her weight. "With the help of Jenny Craig and daily exercise, I was able to lose over 45 pounds over several months," she says. While not overly restrictive, her diet did call for a major makeover in the way she approached food: no junk food, a heavy emphasis on vegetables, and major cutbacks on meat and alcohol. She also upped her water intake and practiced portion control.

Proud of her weight loss and with summer approaching, Fusco was eager to show off her new shape. Once she was back in body-revealing clothes, however, she realized that it wasn't just extra pounds she lost; her eczema had disappeared too.

Could her dramatic weight loss or her healthier approach to eating put the brakes on a severe skin condition? According to the dermatologists we asked, it's very possible.

"Weight loss, generally speaking, may improve eczema," New Jersey-based dermatologist Jeanine Downie, MD, tells *Health*. "Additionally, her regular exercise also decreased her stress level, which might have improved her eczema as well."

Southern California-based dermatologist **Ava Shamban**, MD, agrees. "Eczema is an inflammatory condition of the skin, and treating the entire body with an anti-inflammatory approach does help it," Dr. Shamban explains to *Health*. By changing her diet to eliminate junk food and putting a new emphasis on vegetables and good portion control, [she] reduces systemic inflammation, thereby helping eliminate her eczema."

While Fusco's didn't change her diet with her eczema in mind, a change in eating is fairly standard suggestion for those struggling with the skin condition, according to nutritionist and registered dietitian Cynthia Sass, MPH, RD.

"If you search for 'eczema diet' online you'll find a number of different protocols. But the standard approach is to begin with an elimination diet, which entails cutting out foods that may be triggering inflammation for at least four weeks, sometimes longer," explains Sass. "A nutritious diet not only supports immunity and supplies nutrients involved in skin maintenance and healing, it also improves the health of your gut, which is critical for immune function."

The medical experts we spoke to seem to agree that the changes in Fusco's diet—more so than the weight loss itself—are likely what caused her eczema to subside. Either way, she's overjoyed with the results.

"I changed my diet to get healthier and lose the weight I had been struggling with, but the disappearance of my eczema has been a major added bonus," she says. "All the benefits that have come from making positive changes have kept me even more motivated to continue on my healthy journey."

<http://www.health.com/eczema/eczema-diet-weight-loss-link>