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FOR MEN AND WOMEN

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**FEATURING:
TRISH STRATUS**

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Dr. Julie, I have eczema and I know that it flares when I am stressed. What can I do to help prevent the eczema from becoming really bad? I love to exercise and work out, but I'm worried that the sweat will worsen my skin issues. Please help!

MANY of my patients have inflammatory skin conditions like eczema or psoriasis and they are always asking about supplements or lifestyle suggestions to help with these skin conditions. I usually have them build a foundation of healthy skin with an anti-inflammatory diet that is mostly plant-based and low in processed foods and sugars. Then we layer on that foundation with regular physical activity and adequate sleep to build a thorough, strong foundation for healthy skin.

Many people aren't aware that food sensitivities or allergies may trigger eczema flare ups. Similarly, stress, lack of sleep, dry skin or skin irritants can also trigger a flare. So while you are on the right track of making sure to control your stress so your skin is less likely to flare, you can also get tested for food sensitivity so you know to avoid

food triggers.

You will also need to drink lots of fluids, get plenty of sleep, and make sure you are using topical hypoallergenic lotions to moisturize your skin frequently several times during the day, every day. If your skin barrier breaks down from being too dry, it will irritate your skin and may trigger a flare as well.

Now, if you already do those things, what else can you do to help your skin stay clear?

Make sure you are using a gentle wash that doesn't irritate or strip the skin of its essential oils, which sometimes can cause more skin issues, including acne eruptions. Then you should use a moisturizer based on your skin type. Pick one that's either oil-free for those with oily skin or a more emollient moisturizer if you have dry skin. Some of my patients with com-

ination skin will use the oil-free moisturizer all over their skin and then add a more emollient one over the dry areas.

Finally, supplements that help to keep our skin healthily by creating its own layer of protection include fish or flaxseed oil, low dosage of natural vitamin E, vitamin C, and anti-inflammatory supplements like curcumin or ginger. The supplements can help your skin, even when your entire body's physiology tends towards have inflammatory issues.

These are just a few options. Ask your physician or naturopath for others if the basics aren't enough. Keep in mind that the essential foundations of an anti-inflammatory diet, regular exercise and plenty of sleep are always necessary for optimal skin conditions.

Although sweat may irritate your skin, exercise is great for stress management and helps to keep your body healthy from the inside out—including your skin. I recommend taking a shower after your work out, then moisturize and put on clean dry clothes. As long as you are not in wet clothes for too long, I definitely recommend that you continue with your healthy habit of working out. ■

Dr. Julie T. Chen, MD, is an integrative medicine physician with her own practice in San Jose, CA. Check out her website at makinghealthy.com.