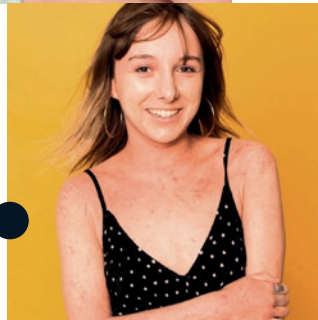


# Life in my body... with full-body eczema

**Amara Howe, 25, a recruiter for mental health charities, on what it's like to live with severe atopic dermatitis**



before I met my current boyfriend two years ago, I went on loads of dates. But once, I got so drunk on a date that I cried to the guy about my skin. When I started having sex, I felt more embarrassed and self-conscious than usual. I wanted to stand in my underwear and look sexy – and I didn't feel sexy with eczema.

The doctor gave me steroids for my skin when I was 18, but I stopped taking them as I felt they didn't agree with me.

Now, I'm finding my own coping mechanisms – physical and mental – and I'm trying to pursue natural solutions instead. I'd encourage anyone suffering to work with their doctor to find their own strategies, though.

I still struggle to accept living with eczema. I don't think you can fully embrace it – and you shouldn't have to. Because the reality is, it isn't pretty. I think the skin positivity movement can be both positive and negative. I'd like to see more girls with eczema or bad skin in adverts, but I don't necessarily agree that you have to love your flaws. I'm trying to strike a balance between not wanting to have eczema, but also not hating myself with it.

It all started with my wrists. I was 18 when a small patch of red skin appeared that was irritated and itchy. Within six months, that tiny patch had spread all over my body, and my doctor confirmed that I had atopic dermatitis, a severe form of eczema – an immune disorder that causes dry, red, rashy, itchy skin.

I think it was caused by stress during a period of huge change in my life – I'd just finished college,

got my first job in a shoe shop and was with my first boyfriend. But I also hadn't got into university and had severe anxiety. I thought, "What have I done to deserve this?"

My skin goes through ups and downs. Last Christmas it was so bad that I had to have a month off work. Five years ago, it was at its absolute worst. I would scratch and it'd instantly bleed. It was like having paper cuts all over my skin. I had to have baths every day because

showers would sting my skin. I was constantly looking in the mirror and seeing a red face that didn't feel like mine.

At the moment, it's relatively manageable, but my skin's still so flaky.

Eczema affects my mental health too. I've always suffered with body dysmorphia, even before I developed the condition. I had a nose

job at 16, which helped me to feel comfortable with the way I looked. But then my skin flared up and I found something new to hate.

I've always been confident with dating –

## WHAT HELPS AMARA

**1 Moisturising**  
Dream Cream from Lush is amazing for soothing my skin – I've been using it for months and apply it daily. It's not cheap when you're buying it regularly, but it's worth it.

**2 Meditating**  
I meditate every day and try not to get too stressed, as this can cause a flare-up. YouTube videos are helpful for guided meditation – I like Michael Sealey's channel.

**3 Mrs Hinch**  
Keeping a clear headspace by putting on fresh bedding or tidying my room helps when I feel stressed out by my skin. I think it's important to look after myself in small ways.

AS TOLD TO EMILY GULLA, AMARA HAS FOUND SOLUTIONS THAT WORK FOR HER. DERMATOLOGISTS RECOMMEND FINDING WHAT WORKS FOR INDIVIDUALS BY SPEAKING TO YOUR DOCTOR FOR MORE INFORMATION. CONTACT DR ADAM FRIEDMANN, CONSULTANT DERMATOLOGIST, AT THEFAREASTREETDERMATOLOGICLINIC.CO.UK