

Raelle Brown
Patient

"Eczema is all-encompassing. It's the whole person. It's definitely not just the skin. It's your time, it's your money, it's your mental health, and it's your relationships."
– Raelle Brown, Patient

Raelle Brown was born with eczema. She has struggled with it on and off throughout her entire life. At seven years old, she was also diagnosed with asthma during a trip to the emergency room. Because of the severity of her asthma, it took center stage for the next few years. But anytime it died down, an eczema flare was there to fill its shoes.

Like so many others, Raelle moved from dermatologist to dermatologist and was put on various treatment regimens, from creams to topical steroids, none of which seemed to work. Her mother – who also has eczema – carefully watched how Raelle interacted with everything in their home. If a soap, detergent, fabric, or food triggered a rash, her mom would remove it to try and make Raelle more comfortable. Before bed, she put socks on Raelle's hands to keep her from scratching through her skin and gave her back massages while playing encouraging messages to keep Raelle's spirits up. This went on for years, affecting everything in Raelle's life, from her sleep and health to her friendships and confidence.

After puberty, the topical steroids started working, and throughout middle and high school, Raelle used them consistently, increasing her dosage during flares. It was a cycle she came to know well. Every stressor, whether physical or emotional, triggered a flare. And every flare brought more stress. But, overall, her skin was improving.

At 26, however, Raelle experienced the worst flare she'd ever had. The topical steroids stopped working, and she went through an excruciating withdrawal. She became covered in an itchy, oozing, shedding rash from head to toe. Not only did her body feel unrecognizable, but her hair also started coming out, and the simple act of getting dressed was so painful that she stayed home for weeks at a time in loose-fitting pajamas. No moisturizer was strong enough to battle the itch, and even Epsom salt baths would only soothe the pain for a short while. Raelle spent most of that time in bed, changing her sheets daily because they were covered in blood or dead skin from the night before.

With an already reserved personality, the severity of her eczema made Raelle even shyer. She didn't want to see anyone outside her bubble, and her social life shrunk to the tiniest circle. During these months, Raelle spent hours a day on her phone and computer, researching solutions, meeting fellow sufferers, and learning to advocate for herself.

Using what she learned through her research, Raelle changed her diet, adjusted her treatment regimen, and moved to a new city. Her skin and health continue to improve, and she's using her voice to help others navigate the discomfort and anxiety of living with eczema.

Raelle's hopes for the future are that doctors and researchers come to appreciate how individualized eczema is and treat each person based on their specific experience. She also hopes that the severity of eczema will become more normalized so that no one feels isolated because of their condition.