



# HerbClip™

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**FILE: ■ Kampo Japanese Formula**  
**■ Atopic Dermatitis**  
**■ Eczema**

**HC 040256-286**

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**RE: Japanese Combination Formula for Treatment of Eczema: A Clinical Study**

Kobayashi H, Mizuno N, Teramae H, Kutsuna H, Ueoku S, Onoyama J, et al. The effects of Hochu-ekki-to in patients with atopic dermatitis resistant to conventional treatment. *Int J Tissue React.* 2004(3/4):113–117.

Atopic dermatitis (eczema) is an immune-mediated dermatological condition characterized by severe and prolonged itching and rough, red patches of skin. Rash typically occurs on the face, neck, upper trunk, wrists, hands, knees, and elbows. It may form weeping, crusting lesions, which can become infected. Patients with atopic dermatitis may have difficulty sleeping due to the discomfort caused by the rash and suffer social isolation because of embarrassment or inability to be in public without scratching. Emotional stress; sweating; rough clothing; chemical irritants; food allergies to cow's milk, wheat, eggs, soy, peanut and tree nuts, and fish; and environmental allergies to dust, mold, and cat dander can all cause or exacerbate atopic dermatitis.

Hochu-ekki-to is a traditional Japanese Kampo medicine containing astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*) root, licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), jujube (*Ziziphus jujuba*), eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*), cang-zhu atractylodes (*Atractylodes lancea* syn. *A. ovata*) rhizome, fresh ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), and dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*) root. The proportions of these herbs in the formula were not specified. While primarily used as an adjunct to cancer therapy, it has been used to treat atopic dermatitis, conditions caused by aberrant nutrition (malnutrition or over nutrition), psychological stress, and "blood stasis." Hochu-ekki-to's English name is "tonify the Middle and Augment the Qi Formula"; its Chinese name is "Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang".

Ten subjects (5 men and 5 women), ages 14–38 years (average 26.5 years), with a 5–38 year history of atopic dermatitis (average 14.8 years) were enrolled in this unblinded, non-randomized, clinical trial. They received 7.5 g/day Hochu-ekki-to extract granules (EK-41, Kanebou Co., Ltd., Tokyo) for 3 months. All were being treated with conventional Western medicines, which were not specified. They were allowed to continue their medications during

the trial, which included topical steroids for 9 of the volunteers, plus oral antihistamines in 7 volunteers, and a nonsteroidal ointment in 1 volunteer. The formula (EK-41) has the following indications approved by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare: those who are lacking energy, having lowered gastric function, and are easily tired; weak constitution; fatigue and lassitude; weakness after an illness; loss of appetite; and night sweats. The formula is often used to help in the recovery from exhaustive disease and surgery. As mentioned earlier, typically, it is prescribed for cancer patients as an adjunct therapy with chemotherapy and radiation in order to enhance efficacy and reduce side effects.

Outcome measures included changes in skin symptoms as rated by the volunteers on a 5-step scale: severest, severe, moderate, mild, and none. The supplement was considered "*markedly effective*" when a patient exhibited at least a three-rank improvement or no skin symptoms for at least 6 months, *moderately effective* when he/she exhibited a two-rank improvement, *slightly effective* when he/she exhibited a one-rank improvement, and *ineffective* when he/she showed no improvement or aggravation of symptoms." Blood samples were gathered at baseline and at the end of the supplementation period to analyze the numbers of white blood cells (WBC), eosinophils, serum IgE (immunoglobulin E), and IgG<sub>4</sub> (immunoglobulin G<sub>4</sub>). It is common for people with serious allergic conditions, such as atopic dermatitis, to have elevated eosinophils and IgE.

All subjects experienced some improvement in clinical symptoms. Supplementation with Hochu-ekki-to resulted in 4 volunteers experiencing marked improvement, 4 having moderate improvement, and 2 slight having improvement. WBC and eosinophils were significantly decreased after 12 weeks of supplementation compared to baseline (values not reported;  $P < 0.05$ ). A trend towards decreased IgE was noted in 7 volunteers, but this did not reach statistical significance. IgG<sub>4</sub> levels were not significantly changed and no trend was noted. Adverse reactions were not reported.

This small clinical trial demonstrated that Hochu-ekki-to can decrease symptoms of atopic dermatitis and hematological markers excessive immune activation. Since there was no placebo group and the subjects knew they were taking the supplement, it is difficult to know if these results could be repeated in a more rigorous, double-blind, placebo controlled trial. Atopic dermatitis can be debilitating and difficult to treat. While topical steroids can suppress the inflammatory reaction in the skin, they can also cause side effects, including skin atrophy (thinning of the skin).<sup>1</sup> Safe, effective alternatives are therefore needed. Most children with atopic dermatitis have food allergies.<sup>2</sup> Vegetarian diet,<sup>3</sup> licorice gel,<sup>4</sup> and probiotics<sup>5-8</sup> have also been shown effective at preventing or treating dermatitis. Atopic dermatitis is considered a disease related to weakened qi and gastric function in Kampo and Chinese medicine. Hence Hochu-ekki-to is used for atopic dermatitis patients as a basic intervention to address fundamental problems that lie deep beneath the surface, not as a treatment for superficial symptoms such as a skin rash. Conventional skin treatments are temporary relief and do not cure the underlying malady.

—John Neustadt, ND

## References

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