

Eczema management apps don't always provide best information: NTU-led research team

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Eczema management apps are meant provide reminders of when to moisturise and tracking functions to monitor patients' eczema conditions.

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SINGAPORE — There are many mobile apps out there purporting to teach patients how

to manage their eczema but a research team led by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) found that at least one third of them provide information that is not consistent with international treatments and condition guidelines.

Drawing inspiration from weight loss apps, which help users to track their food intake and exercise regimens, [eczema management apps](#) provide reminders of when to moisturise and tracking functions to monitor patients' eczema conditions.

Associate professor Josip Car from Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine at NTU found a huge variation in the quality of apps available worldwide, and found that “none of them fulfilled the complete set of criteria for educational information, tracking functions or health information principles”, NTU said in a release on Tuesday (June 11)

The team assessed a total of 98 apps — 67 in English, 22 in Chinese and 9 in Spanish.

Using international eczema guidelines from Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, Argentina and China, the team assessed eczema educational information, eczema-specific tracking functions, and compliance with health information principles.

THE FINDINGS

- None of the included apps complied with all criteria for educational information, tracking functions or health information principles.
- Only 15 per cent of the apps provided information supported by international guidelines on pharmacological therapies
- Only 16 per cent provided information on non-pharmacological therapies.

- 11 per cent of the apps failed to mention mainstay therapies such as the use of emollients and moisturisers.

Mr Matthew Gass from the British Association of Dermatologists, which publishes the journal that the study appeared in, said: “It is important that researchers continue to test the accuracy and safety of health apps. There has been an enormous boom in the number of dermatology apps available to the public, and with this comes the risk that some will be inaccurate, and even unsafe.”

Similar concerns have been raised in the past regarding skin cancer apps, he added.

“App developers should clearly label the sources of their information and should make use of existing resources such as published National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines in the UK. There is no doubt that apps will play a big role in the self-management of skin conditions, but we should have high standards for any health apps,” he said.

WHAT IS ECZEMA?

Eczema is characterised by itchiness and red, inflamed skin. It is the top skin condition seen at the National Skin Centre in Singapore.

Half of eczema patients in Singapore have to manage the condition throughout their lives and there is currently no known cure for it, but the symptoms of eczema can be mitigated through daily moisturising.

One in 10 adults here suffer from eczema and in up to a quarter of the cases, the adults have moderate to severe form of the condition and it severely impacts their quality of life.

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