

News

Pricey New Drug Promises Eczema Relief



Korin Miller

Writer

Yahoo Beauty March 29, 2017

Big news for eczema sufferers: On Tuesday, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a new medication to treat the inflammatory skin condition.

Known as Dupixent, the medication is delivered via injection and is designed to help adults who suffer from moderate to severe eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis. According to the FDA, Dupixent was created for patients whose eczema is not controlled by topical therapies.

According to the National Eczema Association, more than 30 million Americans suffer from some form of

eczema. Symptoms include dry, sensitive skin, skin inflammation, very bad itching, dark-colored skin patches, leathery or scaly skin patches, oozing or crusting skin, and areas of swelling. People with atopic dermatitis suffer from red, scaly, crusted bumps that, when scratched, swell, crack, and “weep” clear fluid, the FDA says.

Atopic dermatitis is the most common form of eczema. The condition, which typically starts when a person is a child and can last through adulthood, is caused by a combination of genetic, immune, and environmental factors, according to the FDA.

While the new drug sounds promising for sufferers, it doesn't come cheap — *NBC Nightly News* reports that the twice-per-month injections will cost patients a whopping \$37,000 a year.

The active ingredient in Dupixent is an antibody called dupilumab, which works by binding to a protein that causes inflammation. By binding to this protein, Dupixent stops the inflammatory response that fuels the development of atopic dermatitis.

Gary Goldenberg, MD, medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells Yahoo Beauty that the FDA approval is “great news” for patients who suffer from moderate to severe atopic dermatitis. “There are no systemic medications that are currently approved specifically for this treatment,” he says. “Unlike other medications that suppress the entire immune system, this medication targets the immune system components that are specific for atopic dermatitis.”

Cynthia Bailey, MD, a diplomat of the American Board of Dermatology and president and CEO of Advanced Skin Care and Dermatology, tells Yahoo Beauty that the drug is a “game changer,” noting that doctors are already working to learn how to safely prescribe and use the drug. Joshua Zeichner, MD, a New York City-based dermatologist, tells Yahoo Beauty that the medication is “first in its class.” “Especially in patients with severe eczema, there is a huge unmet need in terms of safe and effective treatments,” he says. “This drug will be life-changing for thousands of people.”

Until now, people suffering from moderate to severe atopic dermatitis were prescribed broad immune suppressants, such as prednisone, cyclosporine, and methotrexate. However, Goldenberg says, these medications have several long-term side effects and are not specific for treatment of eczema — instead, they suppress the entire immune system. According to Bailey, sufferers have had “no good options” for treatment. “If the good hydrating skin care, bleach baths, and avoidance of external and internal allergens don't help, then the disease runs a devastating and life-altering course of total body itch and weepy rash that gets infected over and over,

needing antibiotics, devotion to the slathering of greasy creams and avoidance of any spooky allergen that might play a role,” she says, noting that immune-suppressant drugs were seen as a last resort.

It’s understandable that patients might balk at the high price of the drug, but Goldenberg says it’s on par with the price of similar drugs in the U.S. However, he says he’s hopeful insurance companies will help cover the cost. (Whether they actually will is yet to be determined).

Overall, doctors are excited about the new drug. “While the sticker price is high, this is a major advance in science as well as treatment of this debilitating condition,” Goldenberg says.