

My life has been affected in many ways by severe atopic and contact dermatitis. It has affected my life in more bad ways than I can think of, but on the upside, I have learned some helpful things about myself and life as well. When I was diagnosed with eczema at the age of two that is when my life began to change. I was up all night, scratching all day, but still a happy little child.

To start off with the negative effects of severe atopic and contact dermatitis, I have been disqualified from a full ride Navy Nurse Corps. scholarship. For the military, it can be considered a liability, therefore, disqualifying me, even though I have figured out how to control it for the most part with the help of my newfound dermatologist. I had hoped to go into the Navy Nurse Corps. and become a nurse practitioner like my dermatologist to help others just like myself.

When I started seeing Dr. Hanna, my dermatologist, she started me on a rigorous regiment of taking baths two to three times a day and afterwards lathering with protopic and a steroid ointment with a coat of CeraVe moisturizer to keep all of the medicine in place to ensure moisturization. Prior to seeing her, all I had been doing was taking quick showers, drying off completely and that would be it; me not realizing that this made it worse.

Prior to seeing Dr. Hanna, I worked at Burger King for about 8 months. While there, I always broke out and had many flare ups. When we started seeing Dr. Hanna, she informed us that the crusty, oozing yellow stuff where my eczema was located was actually staph infection. That's when my mom and I realized that I had been getting steroid shots every couple of weeks and they would clear up the staph infection and two weeks later that same infection would pop back up because I wasn't doing anything to help stop the flare. I didn't know how to stop a flare. When she told us that, I was forced to quit my job where I was excelling and making my way up the crew chain.

Dr. Hanna was quick to diagnose me with atopic and contact dermatitis. This now meant that whatever was girlie like and smelled pretty I was no longer allowed to use because her theory was that it was a cause to flare-ups. This is a huge way in which atopic and contact dermatitis has affected my life; I haven't been able to be a girlie-girl except two nights out of the year: Military Ball and Prom. I can't be girlie-girl about anything because I can't paint my nails, I can't wear jewelry, I can't color my hair, and I have to watch what type of material my clothes are because they might start a flare up as well. To go along with that, whenever I take a shower to wash my body, I can't wash my hair. If I wash it in the shower, the shampoo and conditioner run down my neck and break it out and I begin to staph infections again; yet another way that atopic and contact dermatitis affect my life.

The last way that it affects my life negatively is that it affects my sleeping. I usually don't sleep much at night because I wake up scratching, so I sleep with my dad's socks on my hands and arms to help prevent some damage to my skin. So, I have to catch some sleep whenever I can, sometimes it is in class when we're not doing anything.

A positive effect eczema has had on my life is that it has taught me how to deal with a high amount of physical and emotional pain. I realize I have learned how to block out the physical pain by focusing on something else, by being involved in many school activities, such as JROTC. The emotional pain still lingers every now and then because I feel my self-esteem dropping whenever my eczema is really noticeable. Another positive side that I have come to realize, is that it has made me a great reader, because instead of playing outside with the other kids when I was younger, I had to stay inside so that I wouldn't break out; ever since fourth grade, my lexile level reading score has been 1500+ which is the equal to a college student. The last positive thing that I have to say about eczema and how it has affected me, is that it has taught me to make the best out of what you're given in life. I learned at a young age to deal with it because it could be worse; helping me see different perspectives on other people.