



Source: Western Mail (Cardiff) {Main}
Edition:
Country: UK
Date: Monday 28, March 2011
Page: 25
Area: 207 sq. cm
Circulation: ABC 33000 Daily
BRAD info: page rate £5,891.00, scc rate £0.00
Phone: 029 2022 3333
Keyword: Toctino

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Breakthrough treatment helps eczema sufferer face future with confidence

GARY MANSFIELD was becoming increasingly desperate after a long list of creams and steroids had failed to improve his severe eczema.

The skin condition, which affected his hands and feet, had become so bad that he couldn't do up the top button on his shirt without his fingers bleeding.

He endured daily pain for years as he gripped a pen or put on his shoes at the start of every workday.

Fresh bouts of hope, which accompanied a prescription for a new cream or emollient from his GP, would quickly fade as the eczema returned with a vengeance.

But Gary, 42, is finally free from the pain of severe hand eczema, which affects up to 10% of the population, after he was prescribed a breakthrough new treatment called **Toctino**.

The father of two believes the eczema, which appeared "out of the blue" may have been triggered by the death of his mother.

"It wasn't too severe to begin with and I didn't really think much of it," the salesman from Cardiff said. "But then it gradually got worse.

"I had to wear cotton gloves to bed because as soon as I put any cream on them they became dry instantly – washing and showering was painful because water and soap was excruciating on my hands.

"My hands were covered with blisters and I was very conscious of them – I was embarrassed of them."

Over the course of a few years Gary saw a number of doctors, who couldn't agree whether he was suffering from eczema or psoriasis.

He eventually pushed for a referral to see consultant dermatologist Mabs

Chowdhury, who had previously treated his daughter's psoriasis.

It was Mr Chowdhury who suggested that Gary should try Toctino, which belongs to a class of medicines called retinoids and is related to vitamin A. It works by reducing inflammation in the skin.

The prescription medicine is used to treat severe, long-term hand eczema when strong steroid creams or ointments have failed.

"Within the space of a couple of months I started to see a difference," Gary said. "Those results changed my whole attitude – all of a sudden I was

seeing something happening; I was happy and I seemed to be back to my old self.

"At first all the cuts began to heal, the blisters disappeared and then the colour in my hands came back.

"It's not 100% cleared – I'd say it's 99% gone – but there's no pain whatsoever. Everything I'd tried before would work for a little bit but then come back with

a vengeance. But this time it's stayed away."

Mr Chowdhury, consultant dermatologist at University Hospital of Wales, in Cardiff, who treated Gary, said: "People need to see a GP in the first instance because the initial treatment for eczema would be emollients and topical steroids. However, these can be ineffective and difficult to use so asking for a fairly early referral to a specialist to assess the disease is a good idea.

"Treatments we have used are light treatment and immuno-suppressant drugs. But the latest treatment that Gary had, Toctino, is slightly different because it works on vitamin A receptors. Patients can be quite clear of eczema after four to 12 weeks of treatment so for chronic hand eczema, which is quite a common condition, it can really help."



| Gary Mansfield

