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## This Dry-Skin Cure *Sounds* Weird — But It Really Works

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On the grand hierarchy of potential problems a person can have in life, eczema may seem relatively low on the list. But the common condition, which presents itself as red, itchy, inflamed skin, can become so painful and debilitating in severe cases that skin can ooze, crack, and bleed. Understandably, people are willing to do crazy things to cure it: take cold showers, slather on petroleum jelly over high-strength topical steroids, bathe in bleach.

But there's one effective remedy that some eczema sufferers swear by that only *sounds* weird. Originally created to soothe and soften the overworked udders of dairy cows, udder cream is exactly what it sounds like — but it actually has a pretty extensive history as a treatment for roughed-up human skin, too.

The notable example might just be in Vermont's Original Bag Balm, the iconic green aluminum tin that stashes a simple four-ingredient blend of petrolatum, lanolin, 8-hydroxyquinoline sulfate (an antiseptic and preservative), and paraffin wax. As the company's origin story goes, Bag Balm came to be in 1900, when a Vermont farmer named John L. Norris “saddled his best horse and rode 30 long miles” to track down a rumored “miraculous salve for chafed and cracked cow udders.”

In the 118 years since that long and fateful ride, Bag Balm has been used on the driest of skin in the coldest of weather, on cuts, calluses, and chapped lips. (Admiral Richard Byrd is even said to have taken it on his 1937 expedition to the North Pole.) A lesser-known — but equally beloved — udder cream, MooGoo, is used throughout hospitals in Australia; Udderly Smooth's

body cream is so nourishing to peeling, cracking skin, it's often recommended to cancer patients suffering from certain chemotherapy-related skin conditions.

So what do chafed cow udders have in common with dehydrated, eczema-prone human skin? A lot, apparently. "People who suffer from eczema have a genetic alteration to the barrier function of their skin, and are subject to dry skin that itches," says dermatologist **Ava Shamnan**, MD. Another thing that's dry and itchy, with compromised barrier function: the udders of a dairy cow who's had them pulled at for 300 days out of the year. "I think the reasoning goes, 'If it's good for the cow's udder, it must be good for my skin.'"

That line of thinking isn't wrong: You'll find plenty of the same ingredients in formulas like Bag Balm, MooGoo, and Udderly Smooth that you'd see in skin-soothing products not marketed specifically to the bovine. Bag Balm and Udderly Smooth are heavy on the lanolin, the emollient wax secreted from the sebaceous glands of sheep that humans love in lip balms and rich moisturizers; Dr. Shamnan says that the sweet almond, olive, and vitamin E oils in MooGoo's Skin Milk Udder Cream help rebalance and restore the skin's oil content and seal in moisture to stave off dryness.

There's nothing about udder creams that make them any less legit of skin-care preparations than anything at Sephora or CVS that uses those same ingredients. True, you may feel weird slathering on a salve that was once also used on the udders of some poor over-milked cow — but provided you can get that depressing thought out of your head, it's a hell of a lot better than bathing in bleach.

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