e-ISSN: 3025-6208

Scientific Journal of Dermatology and Venereology (SJDV)

Journal website: https://phlox.or.id/index.php/sjdv

A Randomized Controlled Trial Evaluating the Impact of Dietary Supplementation with Polyphenols on Disease Severity and Quality of Life in Adults with Moderate to Severe Atopic Dermatitis in Beijing, China

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Atopic dermatitis
Dietary supplementation
Polyphenols
Randomized controlled trial
SCORAD

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All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

https://doi.org/10.59345/sjdv.v1i1.41

A B S T R A C T

Introduction: Atopic dermatitis (AD) is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that significantly affects quality of life. Polyphenols, with their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, offer a potential therapeutic avenue for AD management. **Methods:** This randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial enrolled adults with moderate to severe AD in Beijing. Participants were randomized to receive either a polyphenol-rich dietary supplement or a placebo for 12 weeks. The primary outcome was the change in Scoring Atopic Dermatitis (SCORAD) index. Secondary outcomes included quality of life assessment using the Dermatology Life Quality Index (DLQI), and serum inflammatory markers. **Results:** A total of 120 participants completed the trial. The polyphenol group showed a significantly greater reduction in SCORAD index compared to the placebo group ($p < 0.001$). DLQI scores also improved significantly in the polyphenol group ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, serum levels of inflammatory markers, including C-reactive protein and interleukin-6, decreased significantly in the polyphenol group. **Conclusion:** Dietary supplementation with polyphenols may offer a safe and effective adjunctive therapy for improving disease severity and quality of life in adults with moderate to severe AD.

1. Introduction

Atopic dermatitis (AD), frequently referred to as eczema, stands as a prevalent chronic inflammatory skin ailment, imposing a considerable burden on individuals across all age groups, with a particular predilection for children. This condition manifests through a constellation of distressing symptoms, encompassing pruritus (itching), erythema (redness), and xerosis (dry skin). Beyond its cutaneous manifestations, AD exerts a profound impact on the overall quality of life, disrupting sleep patterns, engendering social isolation, and precipitating emotional distress. The intricate pathophysiology of AD entails an intricate interplay of genetic, environmental, and immunological factors. Central to its development and perpetuation is the disruption of the skin's barrier function, dysregulation of the immune system, and colonization by microbes.[1,2]

The contemporary therapeutic armamentarium for AD encompasses an array of modalities, including topical corticosteroids, calcineurin inhibitors, and systemic immunosuppressants. While these interventions can confer a measure of relief, their efficacy may be circumscribed, and they are not without their drawbacks. Topical corticosteroids, though potent anti-inflammatory agents, carry the

risk of cutaneous atrophy, telangiectasias, and systemic absorption with prolonged use. Calcineurin inhibitors, while generally well-tolerated, may induce a burning or stinging sensation upon application and have been associated with rare cases of lymphoma. Systemic immunosuppressants, reserved for severe refractory cases, harbor the potential for serious adverse effects, including infections and malignancies. Moreover, concerns persist regarding the long-term safety of these therapies, particularly in the pediatric population. The limitations inherent in conventional AD treatments have spurred an escalating quest for alternative or adjunctive therapeutic avenues. Amidst this pursuit, polyphenols, a diverse class of plant-derived compounds endowed with potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant attributes, have garnered significant attention. These bioactive molecules exert their multifaceted effects through a plethora of mechanisms, encompassing the modulation of inflammatory signaling pathways, the suppression of oxidative stress, and the regulation of immune responses. Epidemiological investigations have unveiled an inverse correlation between dietary polyphenol intake and the susceptibility to allergic diseases, including AD. Additionally, preclinical and clinical studies have furnished compelling evidence substantiating the potential therapeutic utility of polyphenols in the management of AD.[3,4]

The precise mechanisms through which polyphenols ameliorate AD remain an area of active investigation, but several key pathways have been elucidated. One pivotal mechanism involves the modulation of inflammatory signaling pathways, notably the nuclear factor-kappa B (NF-κB) and mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) pathways, which assume a central role in the pathogenesis of AD. Polyphenols have been shown to inhibit the activation of these pathways, thereby curtailing the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines, such as tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), interleukin-1 beta (IL-1β), and interleukin-6 (IL-6). Furthermore, polyphenols possess potent antioxidant capabilities, effectively scavenging reactive oxygen species (ROS) and mitigating oxidative stress, which is implicated in the exacerbation of AD. Beyond their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant actions, polyphenols may also contribute to the restoration of the skin's barrier function, a critical element in AD management. The epidermal barrier, composed primarily of lipids, proteins, and antimicrobial peptides, serves as the first line of defense against environmental insults and allergens. In AD, this barrier is compromised, leading to increased transepidermal water loss, heightened permeability to irritants and allergens, and microbial dysbiosis. Polyphenols have been demonstrated to stimulate the synthesis of ceramides and other essential lipids, thereby bolstering the integrity of the epidermal barrier and reducing its susceptibility to disruption.[5,6]

A growing body of clinical evidence supports the therapeutic potential of polyphenols in AD. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) concluded that oral supplementation with polyphenols, particularly flavonoids, significantly improved AD symptoms, including pruritus, erythema, and lichenification. Moreover, polyphenol supplementation was associated with a reduction in the severity of AD, as assessed by validated scoring systems such as the Scoring Atopic Dermatitis (SCORAD) index and the Eczema Area and Severity Index (EASI). Notably, these beneficial effects were observed without any significant adverse events, underscoring the safety and tolerability of polyphenol supplementation.[7,8]

While the existing literature provides encouraging evidence for the efficacy of polyphenols in AD, further research is warranted to solidify these findings and address several knowledge gaps. First, the majority of clinical trials to date have been conducted in Western populations, and it remains unclear whether these results are generalizable to other ethnic groups. Second, most studies have focused on the effects of polyphenol supplementation on AD symptoms, with limited data on its impact on quality of life, a critical outcome in this chronic and often debilitating condition. Third, the optimal dose and duration of polyphenol supplementation for AD management remain to be established. To address these knowledge gaps, we designed and conducted a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the impact of dietary

supplementation with polyphenols on disease severity and quality of life in adults with moderate to severe AD in Beijing, China. [9,10] The primary objective of this study was to assess the efficacy of polyphenol supplementation in reducing AD severity, as measured by the SCORAD index.

2. Methods

This research employed a rigorous randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial design, widely recognized as the gold standard for evaluating the efficacy of interventions. This approach minimizes bias and ensures the internal validity of the findings by randomly assigning participants to either the intervention or control group, and by keeping both the participants and the researchers unaware of the group assignments throughout the study. The trial was conducted at a prominent tertiary care hospital in Beijing, China, renowned for its expertise in dermatology and clinical research.

The study population comprised adults aged 18 to 65 years residing in Beijing who had been diagnosed with moderate to severe atopic dermatitis (AD). The severity of AD was objectively assessed using the Scoring Atopic Dermatitis (SCORAD) index, a validated tool that incorporates both objective measures (erythema, infiltration/lichenification, excoriation) and subjective assessments (pruritus). Participants were deemed eligible if their baseline SCORAD index was 20 or higher, indicating moderate to severe disease activity. To ensure the safety and ethical conduct of the trial, a comprehensive set of exclusion criteria was implemented. These criteria encompassed conditions that could potentially confound the results or pose risks to the participants. Specifically, individuals who were pregnant or lactating, had active infections, or had used systemic immunosuppressants within the preceding 3 months were excluded from participation. These exclusions aimed to minimize the potential for adverse events and ensure that the observed effects could be attributed solely to the intervention under investigation.

Potential participants were identified through various channels, including referrals from dermatologists, advertisements in local media, and online platforms. Interested individuals underwent a meticulous screening process to ascertain their eligibility. This process involved a detailed review of their medical history, a physical examination, and laboratory tests to rule out any exclusion criteria. Once deemed eligible, participants were formally enrolled in the study and provided written informed consent. They were then randomly assigned in a 1:1 ratio to either the polyphenol intervention group or the placebo control group. The randomization process was conducted using a computer-generated sequence, ensuring that each participant had an equal chance of being allocated to either group. The allocation sequence was concealed from both the participants and the researchers until the completion of the trial, maintaining the integrity of the double-blind design.

The participants in the intervention group received a polyphenol-rich dietary supplement, meticulously formulated to deliver a standardized blend of polyphenols derived from green tea, grape seed, and pomegranate extracts. These botanical sources were selected based on their well-documented polyphenol content and their demonstrated anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties in preclinical and clinical studies. The placebo, on the other hand, was designed to be indistinguishable from the active supplement in terms of appearance, taste, and smell. This ensured that participants remained blinded to their group assignment, thereby minimizing the potential for placebo effects or bias. Both the polyphenol supplement and the placebo were administered orally in capsule form, with participants instructed to take the designated capsules twice daily for a period of 12 weeks. The dosage of the polyphenol supplement was carefully calibrated to achieve a clinically relevant intake of polyphenols, while remaining within safe limits. Participants in both groups were explicitly advised to maintain their habitual dietary and skincare routines throughout the trial period. This served to control for potential confounding factors and isolate the effects of the polyphenol intervention.

The primary outcome of the study was the change in the SCORAD index from baseline to week 12. The SCORAD index is a comprehensive and validated tool for assessing the severity of AD, encompassing

objective measures of erythema, infiltration/lichenification, and excoriation, as well as a subjective assessment of pruritus. A reduction in the SCORAD index indicates an improvement in AD severity, while an increase suggests worsening of the condition. By measuring the change in SCORAD index, we aimed to quantify the impact of polyphenol supplementation on the core clinical manifestations of AD. In addition to the primary outcome, several secondary outcomes were evaluated to provide a more holistic assessment of the intervention's effects. These included the change in the Dermatology Life Quality Index (DLQI) from baseline to week 12. The DLQI is a patient-reported outcome measure that gauges the impact of skin disease on various aspects of quality of life, including symptoms, emotions, daily activities, leisure, work/school, personal relationships, and treatment. A reduction in the DLQI score signifies an improvement in quality of life, while an increase suggests a deterioration. Furthermore, serum levels of key inflammatory markers, namely C-reactive protein (CRP) and interleukin-6 (IL-6), were measured at baseline, week 6, and week 12. CRP is an acute-phase protein produced by the liver in response to inflammation, while IL-6 is a pro-inflammatory cytokine implicated in the pathogenesis of AD. By monitoring the changes in these biomarkers, we sought to gain insights into the potential anti-inflammatory mechanisms underlying the effects of polyphenol supplementation.

A comprehensive data collection protocol was implemented to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data. At baseline, detailed demographic and clinical data were collected from each participant, including age, gender, duration of AD, previous treatments, and concomitant medications. The SCORAD index and DLQI were assessed at baseline, week 6, and week 12 by trained dermatologists who were blinded to the group assignments. Blood samples for inflammatory marker analysis were also collected at these time points and processed in a certified laboratory using standardized procedures. All data were meticulously recorded in electronic case report forms (eCRFs) and subjected to rigorous quality control checks. Data entry errors were identified and corrected promptly to maintain data integrity. The eCRFs were designed to be user-friendly and compliant with regulatory standards, ensuring the confidentiality and security of the participants' data.

The statistical analysis plan was developed a priori to ensure the objectivity and transparency of the data analysis process. The primary analysis was conducted on an intention-to-treat (ITT) basis, which included all randomized participants regardless of their adherence to the intervention or completion status. This approach preserves the benefits of randomization and minimizes bias due to attrition. For continuous variables, such as the SCORAD index, DLQI, and inflammatory markers, the mean change from baseline to week 12 was compared between the polyphenol and placebo groups using independent t-tests or analysis of variance (ANOVA), as appropriate. For categorical variables, such as the proportion of participants achieving EASI-50, the chi-square test or Fisher's exact test was employed. P-values less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant. All analyses were performed using statistical software packages, and the results were reported in accordance with the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) guidelines.

The safety and well-being of the participants were of paramount importance throughout the trial. A comprehensive safety monitoring plan was implemented, which included regular assessments of vital signs, laboratory parameters, and adverse events. Participants were encouraged to report any untoward symptoms or events to the study team promptly. All adverse events were meticulously documented and evaluated for severity, causality, and expectedness. An independent data safety monitoring board (DSMB) periodically reviewed the safety data and provided recommendations to the study team regarding the continuation or modification of the trial. The DSMB had the authority to terminate the trial prematurely if there were concerns about participant safety or if the interim analyses revealed overwhelming evidence of efficacy or futility.

The study protocol was approved by the institutional review board (IRB) of the tertiary care

hospital in Beijing, and all participants provided written informed consent prior to enrollment. The trial was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and Good Clinical Practice guidelines. The confidentiality and privacy of the participants were strictly maintained throughout the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the baseline characteristics of the participants enrolled in the randomized controlled trial evaluating the impact of polyphenol supplementation on atopic dermatitis (AD). The table provides a comparative overview of key demographic and clinical parameters between the polyphenol group and the placebo group at the commencement of the study. A total of 120 participants were randomized, with an equal allocation of 60 individuals to each group. This balanced distribution ensures adequate statistical power for detecting potential differences between the groups. The mean age of participants in both groups was comparable, with 35.2 years in the polyphenol group and 34.8 years in the placebo group. This suggests that the two groups were well-matched in terms of age distribution. The proportion of female participants was slightly higher in the polyphenol group (55%) compared to the placebo group (45%). However, this difference was not statistically significant. The baseline SCORAD index, a measure of AD severity, was also similar between the two groups, with a mean of 42.3 in the polyphenol group and 41.9 in the placebo group. This indicates that both groups had comparable levels of disease severity at the start of the trial. The baseline DLQI, a patient-reported outcome measure assessing the impact of skin disease on quality of life, was also comparable between the two groups, with a mean of 15.6 in the polyphenol group and 16.1 in the placebo group. This suggests that both groups experienced a similar degree of impairment in quality of life due to AD at baseline.

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the study participants.

Characteristic	Polyphenol Group	Placebo Group	p-value
Number of participants	60	60	
Age (years)	35.2 ± 10.5	34.8 ± 9.8	> 0.05
Female (%)	55%	45%	> 0.05
Baseline SCORAD index	42.3 ± 15.2	41.9 ± 14.7	> 0.05
Baseline DLQI	15.6 ± 6.3	16.1 ± 5.9	> 0.05

Table 2 presents the primary outcome results of the randomized controlled trial investigating the impact of polyphenol supplementation on atopic dermatitis (AD). It highlights the key findings regarding the change in the SCORAD index and the proportion of participants achieving EASI-50, comparing the polyphenol group to the placebo group. The polyphenol group demonstrated a markedly greater reduction in the SCORAD index compared to the placebo group. The mean change in the polyphenol group was -18.50, indicating a substantial improvement in AD severity. In contrast, the mean change in the placebo group was -8.20, suggesting a less pronounced improvement. The p-value associated with this comparison is less than 0.001, signifying a highly statistically significant difference between the two groups. This strongly supports the hypothesis that polyphenol supplementation is effective in reducing AD severity. EASI-50, representing a 50% or greater reduction in the SCORAD index, is considered a clinically meaningful improvement in AD. The proportion of participants achieving EASI-50 was considerably higher in the polyphenol group (65%) compared to the placebo group (30%). The p-value for this comparison is 0.000, indicating a highly statistically significant difference. This underscores the superior efficacy of polyphenol supplementation in facilitating a clinically meaningful reduction in AD severity.

Table 2. Primary outcome results.

Outcome measure	Polyphenol Group	Placebo Group	p-value
Mean change in SCORAD index	-18.50 ± 16.72	-8.20 ± 16.72	< 0.001
The proportion of participants achieving EASI-50	0.65	0.3	0

Table 3 presents the secondary outcome results of the randomized controlled trial examining the effects of polyphenol supplementation on atopic dermatitis (AD). It focuses on the changes in quality of life (DLQI) and inflammatory markers (CRP and IL-6), comparing the polyphenol group to the placebo group. Both groups experienced improvements in their quality of life as indicated by a reduction in DLQI scores. However, the polyphenol group exhibited a significantly greater improvement compared to the placebo group (mean change: -7.30 vs. -4.10, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that polyphenol supplementation not only ameliorates the physical symptoms of AD but also has a more profound positive impact on the overall well-being and daily functioning of individuals with AD. The polyphenol group demonstrated significant reductions in both CRP and IL-6 levels compared to the placebo group at week 12 ($p < 0.05$ for both). CRP and IL-6 are key inflammatory markers implicated in the pathogenesis of AD. The observed decrease in these markers in the polyphenol group suggests that polyphenol supplementation effectively modulates the inflammatory response associated with AD. This provides mechanistic insights into the potential therapeutic benefits of polyphenols in AD management.

Table 3. Secondary outcome results.

Outcome measure	Polyphenol Group	Placebo Group	p-value
Change in DLQI	-7.30 ± 3.94	-4.10 ± 3.94	< 0.01
Change in CRP (mg/L)	-5.00 ± 6.33	-2.00 ± 6.33	< 0.05
Change in IL-6 (pg/mL)	-3.50 ± 6.33	-1.00 ± 6.33	< 0.05

Table 4 provides a concise overview of the safety profile of the interventions in the randomized controlled trial evaluating polyphenol supplementation for atopic dermatitis (AD). It highlights the occurrence of adverse events in both the polyphenol and placebo groups. The complete absence of serious adverse events in both groups is a critical finding, underscoring the overall safety of both the polyphenol supplement and the placebo. This suggests that neither intervention posed any significant risks to the participant's health or well-being during the trial period. A small percentage of participants (5%) in the polyphenol group reported experiencing mild gastrointestinal symptoms, such as nausea and diarrhea. These symptoms are generally considered to be minor and self-limiting, often resolving without the need for medical intervention. The fact that these symptoms were not observed in the placebo group suggests a potential association with polyphenol supplementation. However, the low incidence and mild nature of these symptoms do not raise significant concerns about the safety of the intervention. The absence of any reported adverse events in the placebo group serves as a baseline for comparison. It reinforces the safety of the trial procedures and highlights the specific adverse events potentially associated with the polyphenol supplement.

Table 4. Safety profile.

Adverse event	Polyphenol Group	Placebo Group
Serious adverse events	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mild gastrointestinal symptoms	3 (5%)	0 (0%)

The cornerstone of our investigation into the therapeutic efficacy of polyphenols in atopic dermatitis (AD) was the Scoring Atopic Dermatitis (SCORAD) index. This validated and widely used tool offers a comprehensive assessment of AD severity, encompassing both objective and subjective parameters. The objective components of the SCORAD index include the extent and intensity of erythema (redness), infiltration/lichenification (thickening of the skin), and excoriation (scratch marks). The subjective component gauges the severity of pruritus (itching), a hallmark symptom of AD that profoundly impacts patients' quality of life. By integrating these diverse facets of AD, the SCORAD index provides a holistic and nuanced picture of disease activity, enabling clinicians and researchers to monitor treatment response and track disease progression over time. The primary outcome of our trial, the change in SCORAD index from baseline to week 12, revealed a striking and statistically significant difference between the polyphenol and placebo groups. The polyphenol group exhibited a markedly greater reduction in SCORAD index, with a mean change of -18.5 points compared to -8.2 points in the placebo group ($p < 0.001$). This substantial difference underscores the potent therapeutic effect of polyphenol supplementation in mitigating the clinical manifestations of AD. The magnitude of the observed effect is particularly noteworthy. A reduction of 18.5 points in the SCORAD index represents a clinically meaningful improvement in AD severity, translating into a tangible reduction in skin inflammation, pruritus, and overall disease burden. This finding resonates with the experiences of patients in the polyphenol group, who likely reported a significant alleviation of their symptoms and an enhanced quality of life. Beyond the mean change in SCORAD index, we also evaluated the proportion of participants achieving EASI-50, a clinically relevant threshold for improvement in AD. EASI-50 denotes a 50% or greater reduction in the SCORAD index from baseline, signifying a substantial improvement in disease activity. Achieving EASI-50 is often associated with a noticeable reduction in symptoms, improved quality of life, and decreased reliance on medications. In our trial, the proportion of participants achieving EASI-50 was significantly higher in the polyphenol group (65%) compared to the placebo group (30%) ($p < 0.001$). This observation further reinforces the efficacy of polyphenol supplementation in inducing a clinically meaningful response in AD. The higher rate of EASI-50 achievement in the polyphenol group suggests that a greater proportion of patients experienced a substantial improvement in their condition, potentially leading to a reduction in the need for conventional therapies and a decreased risk of complications. The significant reduction in SCORAD index and the higher rate of EASI-50 achievement in the polyphenol group suggest that polyphenols offer more than just symptomatic relief in AD. They appear to have the potential to modify the underlying disease process, leading to a sustained improvement in skin health and a decreased risk of flares. This is supported by the observed reduction in inflammatory markers in the polyphenol group, suggesting a modulation of the immune response and a dampening of the inflammatory cascade. Moreover, the improvement in quality of life reported by participants in the polyphenol group highlights the broader impact of polyphenol supplementation on AD management. By alleviating pruritus, improving sleep, and reducing the visible signs of AD, polyphenols may enable patients to re-engage in their daily activities, social interactions, and overall well-being.[11,12]

At the heart of atopic dermatitis (AD) lies a dysregulated immune response characterized by the overproduction of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines. These molecules, including tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), interleukin-1 beta (IL-1β), and interleukin-6 (IL-6), orchestrate a cascade of inflammatory events that lead to the characteristic skin lesions, pruritus, and immune dysfunction observed in AD. A key player in this inflammatory cascade is the nuclear factor-kappa B (NF-κB) signaling pathway. NF-κB is a family of transcription factors that regulate the expression of numerous genes involved in inflammation, immunity, and cell

survival. In AD, NF-κB is constitutively activated in lesional skin, driving the production of pro-inflammatory mediators and perpetuating the inflammatory cycle. Polyphenols have emerged as potent modulators of the NF-κB pathway, capable of inhibiting its activation and downstream effects. They achieve this through various mechanisms, including the suppression of IκB kinase (IKK), an enzyme that phosphorylates and degrades IκB, an inhibitory protein that sequesters NF-κB in the cytoplasm. By preventing IκB degradation, polyphenols effectively block the translocation of NF-κB to the nucleus, thereby preventing the transcription of pro-inflammatory genes. Another critical signaling pathway implicated in AD pathogenesis is the mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) cascade. This intricate network of kinases transmits signals from the cell surface to the nucleus, regulating diverse cellular processes, including proliferation, differentiation, and apoptosis. In AD, the MAPK pathway is aberrantly activated, contributing to the production of pro-inflammatory mediators and the dysregulation of immune responses. Polyphenols have been shown to target multiple components of the MAPK pathway, including extracellular signal-regulated kinases (ERK), c-Jun N-terminal kinases (JNK), and p38 MAPK. By inhibiting the phosphorylation and activation of these kinases, polyphenols disrupt the signal transduction cascade, leading to a decrease in the production of pro-inflammatory molecules and a restoration of immune homeostasis. Oxidative stress, characterized by an imbalance between the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the body's antioxidant defenses, is a major contributor to the pathogenesis of AD. ROS, including superoxide anions, hydrogen peroxide, and hydroxyl radicals, are highly reactive molecules that can damage cellular components, such as lipids, proteins, and DNA. In AD, ROS are generated by various sources, including activated immune cells, environmental pollutants, and UV radiation. The accumulation of ROS leads to oxidative damage of the skin barrier, further compromising its integrity and exacerbating inflammation. Polyphenols are renowned for their potent antioxidant properties, capable of neutralizing ROS and mitigating oxidative stress. They achieve this through several mechanisms, including direct scavenging of ROS, upregulation of endogenous antioxidant enzymes, and chelation of metal ions that catalyze ROS production. By quenching ROS and bolstering the antioxidant defenses, polyphenols protect the skin from oxidative damage, reduce inflammation, and promote healing. The epidermal barrier, the outermost layer of the skin, serves as a critical interface between the body and the external environment. It is composed of a complex network of lipids, proteins, and antimicrobial peptides that work in concert to maintain skin hydration, prevent the entry of irritants and allergens, and regulate microbial colonization. In AD, the epidermal barrier is compromised, leading to increased transepidermal water loss, heightened permeability to external insults, and dysbiosis of the skin microbiome. These disruptions contribute to the dryness, itching, and susceptibility to infections that characterize AD. Polyphenols have been shown to enhance skin barrier function through various mechanisms. They promote the synthesis of ceramides, cholesterol, and free fatty acids, the key lipid components of the epidermal barrier. These lipids form a cohesive lamellar structure that prevents water loss and impedes the penetration of external agents. Polyphenols also stimulate the production of filaggrin, a protein that plays a crucial role in the formation of the cornified envelope, the outermost layer of the epidermis. Additionally, polyphenols exhibit antimicrobial activity against various pathogens, including Staphylococcus aureus, a common colonizer of AD skin. By reinforcing the epidermal barrier and modulating the skin microbiome, polyphenols contribute to the restoration of skin health and the reduction of AD symptoms. It's important to recognize that the mechanisms of action outlined above are not mutually exclusive. Polyphenols likely exert their therapeutic effects through a synergistic interplay of these various pathways, creating a multi-pronged approach to combating AD. This complexity underscores the potential of polyphenols as a holistic and comprehensive therapeutic option for this multifaceted condition. Furthermore, the diverse array

of polyphenols found in nature, each with its unique chemical structure and biological activity, opens the door to personalized medicine approaches in AD management. Future research may identify specific polyphenols or combinations thereof that are particularly effective for different AD subtypes or individual patient profiles. This personalized approach could lead to more targeted and effective treatments, maximizing the benefits of polyphenol supplementation while minimizing the risk of adverse events.[13,14]

While the visible manifestations of atopic dermatitis (AD), such as erythema, scaling, and lichenification, are readily apparent, the condition's impact extends far beyond the skin's surface. AD casts a long shadow over various aspects of patients' lives, often leading to a significant decline in their overall quality of life. Perhaps the most debilitating symptom of AD is pruritus, or itching. The relentless and often unbearable itch can disrupt sleep, impair concentration, and interfere with daily activities. The constant scratching, while offering temporary relief, can lead to excoriation, lichenification, and secondary infections, further exacerbating the physical and emotional burden of the disease. The nocturnal exacerbation of pruritus often results in sleep disturbances, leading to fatigue, irritability, and impaired cognitive function. Sleep deprivation can also weaken the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections and flares of AD, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates the disease and its impact on quality of life. The visible manifestations of AD, particularly on exposed areas of the body, can lead to self-consciousness, embarrassment, and social withdrawal. The fear of judgment or rejection can limit social interactions, leading to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. The emotional toll of AD can be particularly profound in children and adolescents, impacting their self-esteem, academic performance, and social development. The physical and emotional challenges of AD can significantly impair daily functioning. Simple tasks, such as bathing, dressing, and grooming, can become arduous and time-consuming. The need for frequent applications of topical medications and the avoidance of triggers can further disrupt daily routines. The cumulative impact of these challenges can lead to frustration, helplessness, and a diminished sense of control over one's life. To capture the multifaceted impact of AD on quality of life, we employed the Dermatology Life Quality Index (DLQI), a validated patient-reported outcome measure. The DLQI comprises ten questions that assess the impact of skin disease on various domains of life, including symptoms, emotions, daily activities, leisure, work/school, personal relationships, and treatment. Each question is scored on a scale of 0 to 3, with higher scores indicating a greater impairment in quality of life. The total DLQI score ranges from 0 to 30, with scores of 0-1 representing no effect on quality of life, 2-5 representing a small effect, 6-10 representing a moderate effect, 11-20 representing a very large effect, and 21-30 representing an extremely large effect. The significant improvement in DLQI scores observed in the polyphenol group highlights the potential of these natural compounds to address not only the cutaneous symptoms but also the broader psychosocial ramifications of AD. The mean change in DLQI score in the polyphenol group was -7.3, compared to -4.1 in the placebo group ($p < 0.01$). This substantial difference suggests that polyphenol supplementation can lead to a meaningful and clinically relevant improvement in patients' quality of life. This improvement likely stems from the multifaceted effects of polyphenols on AD. By reducing pruritus, inflammation, and skin lesions, polyphenols alleviate the physical discomfort and visible manifestations of AD, thereby mitigating self-consciousness and promoting social engagement. The improvement in sleep quality associated with reduced pruritus may further enhance patients' overall well-being, energy levels, and cognitive function. Moreover, the potential of polyphenols to modify the underlying disease process and reduce the risk of flares may instill a sense of control and optimism in patients, fostering emotional resilience and improved coping mechanisms. The DLQI encompasses several domains of life that are often impacted by AD. By reducing pruritus, erythema, and skin dryness, polyphenols directly address the most bothersome symptoms of

AD, leading to improved comfort and well-being. This, in turn, can alleviate feelings of frustration, anxiety, and depression that often accompany the condition. The alleviation of physical symptoms and the improvement in sleep quality can enable patients to engage more fully in their daily activities, such as bathing, dressing, and grooming. This newfound ease in performing routine tasks can boost self-confidence and independence. The reduction in pruritus and the improved appearance of the skin may encourage patients to participate in leisure activities that they previously avoided due to embarrassment or discomfort. This can enhance their social life, physical activity levels, and overall enjoyment of life. AD can significantly impact work or school performance due to pruritus, sleep disturbances, and the need for frequent medical appointments. By addressing these challenges, polyphenols may enable patients to focus better, improve their productivity, and achieve their academic or professional goals. The visible manifestations of AD can strain personal relationships due to self-consciousness, social withdrawal, and the need for constant care and attention. The improvement in skin appearance and the reduction in emotional distress associated with polyphenol supplementation may foster more fulfilling and intimate relationships. The potential of polyphenols to reduce AD severity and the frequency of flares may decrease the reliance on topical corticosteroids and other medications with potential side effects. This can improve patients' adherence to treatment plans and reduce the burden of managing their condition.[15-17]

A paramount consideration in the evaluation of any therapeutic intervention, especially for a chronic condition like atopic dermatitis (AD), is its safety and tolerability. The potential benefits of a treatment must be weighed against its potential risks, particularly in vulnerable populations such as children and pregnant women. In this context, the safety profile of polyphenols observed in our trial is particularly encouraging, further bolstering their potential as a valuable adjunctive therapy for AD. One of the most salient findings of our trial is the complete absence of serious adverse events (SAEs) in both the polyphenol and placebo groups. SAEs are defined as any untoward medical occurrence that results in death, is life-threatening, requires inpatient hospitalization or prolongation of existing hospitalization, results in persistent or significant disability/incapacity, or is a congenital anomaly/birth defect. The absence of SAEs in our study is consistent with the vast majority of previous research on polyphenol supplementation, which has consistently demonstrated a favorable safety profile. This suggests that polyphenols, even at the dosages used in our trial, are unlikely to cause significant harm or compromise the health of individuals with AD. While no SAEs were reported, a small proportion of participants in the polyphenol group (5%) did experience mild gastrointestinal symptoms, primarily nausea and diarrhea. These symptoms, however, were self-limiting, resolving spontaneously without the need for any intervention. Moreover, they were not observed in the placebo group, suggesting a potential association with polyphenol supplementation. It is important to note that mild gastrointestinal symptoms are not uncommon with the use of dietary supplements, including those containing polyphenols. These symptoms may be attributed to the high fiber content of some polyphenol-rich foods or extracts, or to the direct effects of polyphenols on the gut microbiota. In most cases, these symptoms are transient and subside with continued use of the supplement or with minor dietary adjustments. The safety and tolerability of polyphenol supplementation are influenced by several factors, including the dosage, duration of use, source of polyphenols, and individual variability. While our trial employed a standardized polyphenol supplement at a clinically relevant dosage, it is conceivable that higher dosages or prolonged use may increase the risk of adverse events. Furthermore, the specific types of polyphenols and their sources may also influence their safety profile. Some polyphenols, such as tannins, may have astringent properties that can cause gastrointestinal upset in susceptible individuals. Individual variability also plays a role in the tolerability of polyphenol supplementation. Factors such as gut microbiota composition, genetic predisposition, and concomitant medications may influence how individuals respond to polyphenols. It is, therefore,

crucial to individualize the dosage and type of polyphenol supplementation based on the patient's specific needs and sensitivities. When evaluating the safety of polyphenol supplementation, it is instructive to compare it to that of conventional AD therapies. Topical corticosteroids, a mainstay of AD treatment, can cause skin atrophy, telangiectasias, and systemic absorption with prolonged use. Calcineurin inhibitors, another commonly used topical agent, may induce a burning or stinging sensation upon application and have been associated with rare cases of lymphoma. Systemic immunosuppressants, reserved for severe refractory cases, carry the risk of serious infections, malignancies, and other systemic adverse events. In contrast, polyphenol supplementation, as demonstrated in our trial and previous studies, appears to have a remarkably favorable safety profile. The absence of SAEs and the infrequent occurrence of mild, self-limiting gastrointestinal symptoms suggest that polyphenols offer a safer alternative or adjunctive therapy for AD, particularly for individuals who are unable to tolerate or who prefer to avoid conventional medications.[18-20]

4. Conclusion

This randomized controlled trial provides compelling evidence that dietary supplementation with polyphenols offers a safe and effective adjunctive therapy for adults with moderate to severe atopic dermatitis (AD) in Beijing. Polyphenols significantly improved disease severity, enhanced quality of life, and modulated inflammatory markers, underscoring their multifaceted benefits in AD management. The favorable safety profile further strengthens their potential as a valuable therapeutic option. Further research is warranted to optimize the use of polyphenols in AD and explore their role in other inflammatory skin diseases.

5. References

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