



Dry Skin

Our skin is our body's first line of defense against infections and dehydrating effects of the outside world. Healthy skin depends on an outer layer of protein that forms a waterproof seal holding in our body's moisture. If our skin gets too dry, it is not as effective at protecting us and can also cause flaking, tightness, and annoying itching.

What causes dry skin?

- Prolonged, frequent hot showers or baths
- Harsh deodorant soaps or bubble baths
- Exposure to solvents
- Winter is a particularly harsh environment for the skin with the cold, dry, wintry air outdoors combined with dry heated air indoors.
- Excessive sun exposure
- The very young and old are more prone to dry skin. Young children have a thinner top layer of skin that forms the waterproofing seal. Aging increases the problems with dryness since the oil glands of our skin get smaller with age after the teenage years.

What can I do to treat and prevent dry skin?

- Bathe in warm (not hot) water.
- Use mild soaps (Dove, Purpose, Aveeno) or non-soap cleansers (Neutrogena, Oil of Olay). Children who are not yet teenagers may bathe with plain water without soap.
- Avoid long and frequent showers or baths.
- Dry after bathing by patting the skin with a towel rather than rubbing
- Apply dye-free, fragrance-free moisturizing lotion or cream immediately (within 3 minutes) after drying off from bathing to "lock in" the moisture. Some commonly suggested products are Eucerin, Lubriderm, Moisturel, Lachydrin, AHA lotion, and Elta Crème. Some children may need several applications of moisturizers every day.
- Home water filtration systems and home humidifiers may be helpful.
- Avoid scratching, which will further irritate dry skin. OTC Hydrocortisone 1% cream and antihistamines (Benadryl®, Claritin®) may be helpful for the itching, but hydrocortisone should not be used for more than one week in children.
- For severely dry and deeply cracked skin, apply Vaseline or petroleum jelly to the skin 4 times a day and cover with bandages, gloves or socks.

When should I see my doctor?

- If the dry skin does not improve within 2 weeks
- If there is yellow fluid (pus) coming from the cracks of the dry skin

