
Kinder, Gentler Skin Care

How to take care of the skin is a question I get a lot from my patients. Dryness is usually the number one problem. There are many steps you can take to keep your skin from drying out and getting irritated.

Hand Care:

- ❖ Avoid direct contact with harsh chemicals such as cleaning products. Be sure to wear gloves when washing the dishes, working in the garden/yard, or cleaning the house.
- ❖ Minimize excessive hand washing if possible. Although water itself is moisturizing, it is the drying off after water exposure which really strips the skin of its essential oils.
- ❖ For those of you who have to wash your hands frequently (like me), always try to apply some good moisturizers immediately after washing (see below).
- ❖ One really nice trick for severe hand dryness and cracking is to apply petroleum jelly before bedtime and then wear a thin pair of cotton gloves overnight. Latex gloves are not recommended, because:
 - Your hands will feel like it's 200 degrees inside the gloves, and
 - Petroleum jelly dissolves latex. (You may have heard of this in another setting...)
- ❖ The same trick can be used for heel cracking, with one change. Cover the petroleum jelly on the heel with Saran wrap (or other plastic food wrap), and then wear a sock over the whole thing. This can be very effective.

Bathing:

- ❖ Some general tips:
 - A shower is better than a bath.
 - A short shower (less than 5 minutes) is better than a long shower.
 - Lukewarm water is better than hot water. (Boy, I'm taking all the fun out of bathing!)
- ❖ As with hand washing, excessive showering or bathing really dries the skin. Unless you work out on the mud flats, you don't really need to shower twice a day, do you?
- ❖ Use soap only in areas that need cleaning (usually the armpits, neck, groin, and feet). If your arms and legs are not dirty, don't use soap in those areas.
- ❖ Avoid bubble baths (especially if you have atopic dermatitis). I had to throw out a case of Bubble Magic after I found out about this.
- ❖ Aveeno (oatmeal) baths are fine if you're having an eczema flare-up, poison oak, or other itchy rash. An alternative to Aveeno is a sock or panty hose filled with regular oatmeal and tied off. (Important note - please do not try to eat the oatmeal afterwards.)
- ❖ Hot tubs/Jacuzzis are not recommended. They pack a double whammy of hot water and chlorine.

Moisturizing:

- ❖ Use a moisturizer frequently (preferably at least 2-3 times a day). A good time to moisturize is immediately after showering, when the skin is still a little damp (but not dripping wet).
- ❖ There are three common types of moisturizers: lotions, creams, and ointments. In general, the amount of moisturization they provide is as follows:

Less moisturizing
Less greasy

Lotions <<< Creams <<< Ointments

More moisturizing
More greasy

- ❖ I usually recommend ointments or creams for my patients. As you can see, ointments are usually more moisturizing than creams, which in turn are more moisturizing than lotions. If the ointments are too greasy for you, creams can be a good compromise, especially when used under clothing.

- ❖ The main moisturizing ointment on the market is **petroleum jelly**. This can be found in such products as:
 - Vaseline
 - Aquaphor
- ❖ Some good moisturizing creams include:
 - Cetaphil cream
 - DML Forte cream
 - Eucerin cream
 - Moisturel cream
 - Curel cream
- ❖ When washing, you should use a mild soap or non-soap cleanser. Some gentle cleansers include:
 - Dove sensitive skin bar
 - Cetaphil cleanser
 - Eucerin cleanser
 - Aveeno moisturizing bar
 - Neutrogena extra gentle cleanser

Laundry:

- ❖ When doing laundry, try to use detergents that are free of irritating perfumes or dyes. Some mild detergents include:
 - Tide Free
 - Cheer Free
 - All Free
 - Wisk Free (hmm... do you see a trend in the names?)
- ❖ Avoid fabric softeners. Although no one likes static cling, fabric softeners contain many chemicals which can be irritating to sensitive skin.

There are many other excellent products available for dry skin care that I have not mentioned. When choosing a product, try to find one that has no unnecessary additives such as perfumes or dyes. If you find something that you really really like (but not because you own stock in it), let me know and I can add it to the lists above.