

How to Treat Dry Skin

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Dry skin occurs more frequently as we age. It is more of a problem in dry climates such as the desert (Arizona) than in more humid areas such as the Southeast. Here are some tips to help you deal with dry skin.

1. Water is THE active ingredient in moisturizing creams and lotions. All the rest is perfume, coloring, additives, etc. Although creams and ointments are harder to spread over the body than lotions, they last longer. The drier and flakier your skin, the more you might need a cream or ointment. Skin is dry because it lacks water, not oil. All treatment is directed at replacing water in the skin.

2. Frequent use of soap will make your skin drier. Instead of a soapy, hot shower, use lukewarm water for less than ten minutes. Though hot water may make the skin “feel better” for a few minutes, it causes a “rebound” effect, and the skin will itch far more later. Also, a brief shower is preferable to a long one. Try to avoid excessive scrubbing of the back and especially the lower legs, as these areas are very prone to dryness, and rubbing will make them irritated, red, and itchy.

Use soap only on areas that are soiled or that perspire (for example, the underarms, groin, and buttocks). Other areas can be cleaned using only water. Try a mild soap (such as Dove, Cetaphil, Purpose, or Oil of Olay). Good liquid facial soaps for patients with sensitive and/or dry skin are Cetaphil Liquid Cleanser, Aquanil Liquid Cleanser, and Eucerin Gentle Hydrating Cleanser.

3. Test your soap. Can you smell any fragrance. If so, this soap could be irritating. Does the soap float? If yes, it may contain a harsh detergent. Oil-based moisturizing soap bars are heavier than water and sink.

4. After showering, pat your skin dry with a towel, trying to leave some moisture on your skin. Apply a moisturizing cream or lotion as quickly as possible to your entire body. It is important to do this before the skin dries. This allows the product to “trap water” next to your skin.

5. Use moisturizers as often as possible. Keep them by your sink at home and at work. If you have dry hands, apply a cream or lotion after each hand-washing. Again, use lukewarm water and shake out your hands, leaving some moisture on their surface. Then, quickly apply a lotion or cream. Do this especially before going to bed.

Here is a brief list of some good moisturizers, although this list is not meant to be inclusive. Other products may also work for you.

- Body lotions: Cetaphil, Aveeno, DML, Eucerin, Lubriderm
- Creams (for dryer skin, hands): Cetaphil, Aveeno, DML Forte Cream, SBR Lipocream
- Ointments (for very dry skin, especially in children): Aquaphor Ointment, Vaseline Ointment
- Facial Moisturizers: Neutrogena Healthy Defense Daily Moisturizer (SPF 30), Cetaphil Facial Moisturizer (SPF 15), Eucerin Extra Protective Moisture Lotion (SPF 30)

6. Shaving can lead to irritation and dryness. Be sure to change blades frequently and use shaving cream (for lubrication). Shave in the direction the hair grows. Quickly apply a moisturizer over damp skin after shaving.

Additional Suggestions

- Do not take bubble baths.
- Avoid applications of rubbing alcohol, astringents, or deodorant sprays. These will dry the skin.
- Avoid spa-type hot tubs and Jacuzzis. The hot, chlorinated water will strip natural oil from your skin.
- Do not allow the blower from a car heater or home heater to blow directly onto your skin. The hot, dry air will make your skin very dry and itchy and, frequently, chapped and cracked as well.
- Some people are irritated by fabric softener sheets that are used in the dryer. It is best to use a liquid fabric softener such as Downey in the washing machine.