

Hand Care Tips

Simple changes can soothe dry skin

Following the same skin care routine year round may not work so well when the humidity drops. Without a change in your skin care, dry air can make fine lines and wrinkles more noticeable. Dry skin can itch, flake, crack, and even bleed.

To help heal dry skin and prevent its return, dermatologists recommend the following.

1. Prevent baths and showers from making dry skin worse. When your skin is dry, be sure to:

- Close the bathroom door
- Limit your time in the shower or bath to 5 or 10 minutes
- Use warm rather than hot water
- Wash with a gentle, fragrance-free cleanser
- Apply enough cleanser to remove dirt and oil, but avoid using so much that you see a thick lather
- Blot your skin gently dry with a towel
- Slather on the moisturizer immediately after drying your skin

2. Apply moisturizer immediately after washing. Ointments, creams, and lotions (moisturizers) work by trapping existing moisture in your skin. To trap this much-needed moisture, you need to apply a moisturizer within few minutes of:

- Drying off after a shower or bath
- Washing your face or hands
- Use superfatted soaps, but not heavily perfumed soaps. Superfatted soaps add moisturizers; soaps with perfumes wash oils away and make skin drier. Also, liquid soaps are generally more moisturizing than bar soaps when not at work.
- For dry, cracked hands, try applying a thick layer of petroleum jelly to your hands at bedtime, cover with cotton gloves (you can get these at pharmacies), and wash off in the morning. For deep cracks in the skin, apply an antibiotic ointment three times daily.

3. Moisturize. A lot. Unscented moisturizers are better because the fragrances are added to products along with alcohol, which can dry the skin.

4. Use only gentle, unscented skin care products. Some skin care products are too harsh for dry, sensitive skin.

5. Wear gloves. Our hands are often the first place we notice dry skin. You can reduce dry, raw skin by wearing gloves. Be sure to put gloves on before you:

- Go outdoors in winter
- Perform tasks that require you to get your hands wet
- Get chemicals, greases, and other substances on your hands

Don't wear these for long periods, as sweating will also aggravate dermatitis. Always make sure the gloves are scrupulously clean inside.

6. Choose non-irritating clothes and laundry detergent. When our skin is dry and raw even clothes and laundry detergent can be irritating. To avoid this:

- Wear cotton or silk under your clothing made of wool or another material that feels rough
- Use laundry detergent labeled “hypoallergenic”

7. Stay warm without cozying up to a fireplace or other heat source. Sitting in front of an open flame or other heat source can dry your skin.

8. Add moisture to the air. Plug in a humidifier. If you can check your home heating system, find out if you have a humidifier on the system — and whether it's working.

9. Fragrance-free laundry detergents are better for your skin; products with fragrance can transfer from clothes to skin and cause dryness. Fabric softener dryer sheets are also bad, because of the fragrances embedded in them.

References

American Academy of Dermatology: <https://www.aad.org/dermatology-a-to-z/health-and-beauty/general-skin-care/dry-skin-tips>

Vanderbilt University: <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/getthenac/2013/01/vanderbilt-dermatologist-offers-cold-weather-tips-for-taking-care-of-skin/>

DermNet NZ: <http://www.dermnetnz.org/dermatitis/hand-dermatitis.html>