

How to Take Care of Dry Skin

Dry skin occurs when your skin loses too much water and oil. Dry skin is common and can affect anyone at any age. You can get dry skin anywhere on your body. But it commonly shows up on the hands, feet, arms, and lower legs.

Symptoms

- Scaling, flaking, or peeling skin
- Skin that feels rough
- Skin tightness, especially after bathing
- Itching
- Cracks in the skin that may bleed

Causes

- Cold, dry winter air
- Furnaces that heat the air and remove moisture
- Hot, dry air in desert environments
- Air conditioners that cool the air and remove moisture
- Taking long, hot baths or showers frequently
- Washing your hands often
- Some soaps and detergents
- Skin conditions, such as eczema and psoriasis
- Certain medicines (both topical and oral)
- Aging, during which skin gets thinner and produces less natural oil

Home Care Treatments

- Moisturize your skin with an ointment, cream, or lotion 2 to 3 times a day.
- Moisturizers help lock in moisture, so they work best on damp skin. After you bathe, pat skin dry then apply your moisturizer.
- Avoid skin care products and soaps that contain alcohol, fragrances, dyes, or other chemicals.
- Take short, warm baths or showers. Limit your time to 5 to 10 minutes. Avoid taking hot baths or showers.
- Bathe only once a day.
- Instead of regular soap, try using gentle skin cleansers or soap with added moisturizers.
- Only use soap on your face, underarms, genital areas, hands, and feet.
- Avoid scrubbing your skin.
- Shave right after bathing, when hair is soft.
- Wear soft, comfortable clothing next to your skin. Avoid rough fabrics like wool.
- Wash clothes with detergents that are free of dyes or fragrances.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Ease itchy skin by applying a cool compress to irritated areas.
- Try over-the-counter cortisone creams or lotions if your skin is inflamed.
- Look for moisturizers that contain ceramides.

Alert Your Nurse or Physician if..

- You feel itchy without a visible rash
- Dryness and itching keep you from sleeping
- You have open cuts or sores from scratching
- Self-care tips do not relieve your dryness and itching

Source: MedlinePlus, U.S. Library of Medicine, 2017;

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000751.htm>