

Dry skin care

Dry skin, also called **xerosis** (zee-ROW-sis), is one of the most common skin conditions.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH HAVING DRY SKIN?

Skin protects our insides from everything outside of our body. Skin is basically our armor! When our skin is too dry, our "armor" gets tiny cracks in it and doesn't protect us as well. Dry skin can make us itchy, too. We are healthier and more comfortable if we can prevent and repair dry skin.

WHAT IS DRY SKIN LIKE?

- » Rough, flaky, dusty, and/or cracked skin
- » May be regular skin color, but might also have lighter or darker patches, too
- » Some dry skin has tiny bumps, almost like goose bumps
- » Hands, feet, or lips may peel or crack
- » Dry skin can be a little itchy, very itchy, or not itchy at all

WHAT CAUSES DRY SKIN?

- » **Family history** – Dry skin can be passed along in families, just like other skin conditions.
- » **Season** – Your skin may be drier in fall or winter.
- » **Location** – Cool, dry climates can dry skin out.
- » **Swimming** – Pool chemicals may dry the skin out.
- » **Soap** – Soaps remove our skin's natural oils. The skin can't keep moisture in without these oils.
- » **Bathing without a moisturizer** – Dry skin types need a moisturizer after every bath or shower.

DRY SKIN CONDITIONS

The dry skin care in this handout can also be useful for these conditions:

- » **Keratosis pilaris** – rough, bumpy skin on the arms, thighs, and cheeks (handout #31)
- » **Pityriasis alba** – light skin spots with dusty dry skin, often on the face
- » **Atopic dermatitis (eczema)** – itchy dry skin with inflammation or redness of the skin (handout #8)
- » **Seborrheic dermatitis** – dandruff or dry flaky skin on the scalp (handout #45)
- » **Ichthyosis vulgaris** – dry skin with fine white scale on shins and body

HOW CAN I CARE FOR AND REPAIR DRY SKIN?

Dry skin needs proper care, with gentle cleansing and careful moisturizing. Here are some tips for caring for dry skin.

BATH TIME

- Bathe or shower with lukewarm water. Avoid very *hot* or *cold* water.
- Keep bath time short, about 10-15 minutes.
- No bubble bath. Like soap, it removes skin's natural protective oils.
- Use only a small amount of mild soap, and only where needed. Babies and young children can be bathed without soap most days.

Bath Time (cont.)

- Older kids can soap up only dirty areas (such as armpits, genitals, hands, and feet) most days.
- When using cleansers, use them at the end of the bath. This keeps the soap from sitting on the skin so long.
- Do not use anti-bacterial soap. Fragrance-free gentle cleansers are best for kids with dry skin.
- Minimize use of soap on any active rash or itchy skin.
- Do *not* scrub hard when you cleanse the skin.
- After bathing, pat skin dry gently with a towel. Do not rub or scrub the skin.

MOISTURIZERS & PRESCRIPTIONS

- Within 3 minutes after bathing, apply moisturizers to the skin. This routine (also called “soak and seal”) helps to “lock-in” the moisture from the bath water. Then, put on cotton pajamas or other soft clothes.
- After bathing is the most important time to apply a moisturizer!
- You can also use the moisturizer a few times a day on the whole body.
- Thicker moisturizers that are ointments (like petrolatum or petroleum jelly) or fragrance-free creams work better than thinner moisturizers like lotions.
- If you were prescribed a medicated cream or ointment, apply these only to affected skin areas as your doctor instructed you.

LAUNDRY & CLOTHING

- Avoid laundry products with added color or fragrance. Instead, use unscented hypo-allergenic laundry products.
- Avoid dryer sheets. Even unscented dryer sheets have softening chemicals that may irritate sensitive skin.
- If the skin still seems dry or sensitive, try double-rinsing the clothes to fully remove laundry soap.
- Avoid tight or “scratchy” fabrics such as harsh wool.



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