PATIENTS COMMUNITY
PRACTICE AND DISTRICT NURSES
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Tips for maintaining skin integrity

Keeping your skin healthy depends on many things, such as daily use of a lotion/cream on your face and body, a good nutritional diet, high fluid intake, regular exercise and a good sleep routine.

As we get older, changes occur in the skin that make it more susceptible to damage. Smoking, lack of fluids and/or sleep, having very hot baths or showers, can all affect your health status and/or quality of life. Stress can also make your skin more sensitive and trigger skin-related problems. It's important to maintain a healthy state of mind by taking steps to manage your stress and maintain good sleeping habits.

There are many medical factors that can cause dehydrated skin, such as the use of diuretics (water pills), which can lead to skin-related problems. Drinking a lot of coffee and/or alcohol can also cause problems, as they act as a diuretic and may dry out the body tissues and skin.

If you are experiencing dry skin, you should consider avoiding soap products as they remove the protective lipid (natural oil) barrier, increasing the tendency of the skin to be dry and itchy. Emollient soap substitutes are recommended when washing, bathing and showering, followed by intensive moisturiser therapy.

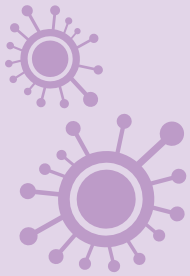
If you have very dry skin, be aware it may react to certain fragrances or chemicals that are added to moisturisers (also known as emollients). If you have concerns, consider using a fragrance-free moisturiser.

Bath emollients and oils are a useful additional treatment to a lotion, spray, cream, or ointment, as they clean and hydrate the whole body. However, beware of the potential risk of slippage/ falling in the bath as an emollient tends to form a greasy film and the use of a rubber mat/grip rail should be considered.

Another way to prevent dry, dehydrated skin is to protect it from the sun by applying a high-factor sun cream. Sun exposure can cause premature skin ageing and increase the risk of skin cancer. The sun's rays are strongest between 10am and 2pm and when possible, it's advisable to stay out of the sun and move into the shade or indoors during these hours.

Dry skin is common and many people experience small dry patches of skin due to factors such as a change of perfume, hair products, soaps, detergents, stress and even the weather. If you experience dry skin and are worried about it, seek advice from you GP as it may be eczema and your GP will be able to treat it.

Eczema tends to present as small cracks and fissures (breaks) on any part of the skin surface and is normally due to scratching or a breakdown in the skin. This damage can provide an entry point for bacteria, which can lead to infection. Staphylococcus aureus (types of germs commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy individuals) is the most common bacterial source of skin infection, causing the eczema to deteriorate. Seeking treatment is a priority before complications occur.



Signs of infected eczema include inflamed (red) and 'weepy' skin with a yellowish crust and/or yellow pus-filled spots (pustules), and small red spots surrounding body hairs (folliculitis).

Bacterial infection of eczema should be treated with specific antiseptics or antibiotics in cases where pustules are present under the skin or when the skin is cracked, broken or weeping. Combination creams that contain both a topical steroid and antibiotic help combat inflammation and infection may be prescribed. Generalised eczema of the body may require a specific antibiotic bath additive to help fight infection. Strong antiseptics should not be used because they can cause irritation. When applying steroid creams/ointments it is advisable to use Latex-free gloves.

Your GP or specialist nurse will advise you on the basic principles of emollient usage and explain the relative benefits of steroid creams (to reduce inflammation) and emollients (to combat dry skin).

For information on skin-related issues visit:

www.legclub.org/public-information-leaflets

www.thh.nhs.uk/documents/_Patients/PatientLeaflets/proceduresConditions/PIID3

www.nhs.uk/conditions/emollients/

eczema.org/

knowyourskin.britishskinfoundation.org.uk/condition/eczema

www.nhs.uk/conditions/itchy-skin

www.mind.org.uk

A special mention to Essity for their advisory contribution on behalf of the Leg Club Industry Partners (LCIP).

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