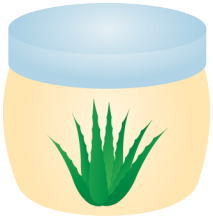
CARE OF YOUR SKIN



Have you ever touched a baby's skin and felt how smooth and soft it is? Do you often wish that your skin would feel that way all the time? As a person ages, the skin loses much of the underlying fat, becomes thinner, drier, and less elastic, causing it to sag and wrinkle. Because the skin changes throughout a person's lifetime, keeping it looking young and healthy requires good skin care each day.

Structure of the Skin

The skin is the largest organ of the body and is made up of 3 layers. The outer layer prevents foreign substances from entering the body and contains cells that produce the dark-colored pigment of the skin. The middle layer is made up of collagen and elastin (proteins that give structure and support), and contains sweat glands, oil glands, hair follicles, blood vessels and nerves. The bottom layer is mainly fat which helps to protect the body from cold and heat. In addition to shielding the body from harmful substances such as bacteria and the sun's harmful rays, the skin also regulates body temperature, and senses pain and pleasure.

Basic Skin Care

1. Limit sun exposure

   Ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun can lead to premature aging of the skin and increase the risk of skin cancer. Fair-skinned people are more prone to sunburn and the effects of the sun's rays. Years of sun exposure before the age of 18 are most damaging to the skin, so make sure that your children are well protected.

   Keep in mind that areas such as the nose, ears, cheeks and shoulders burn more easily. Certain medications may cause a person's skin to be more sensitive to the sun. Talk to your doctor first before spending too much time under the sun.

To protect your skin:

- Stay out of the sun during the hours when the sunlight is most intense (10 am to 4 pm).
- Apply lots of sunscreen 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply every 2 hours, especially after heavy sweating and swimming. Use sunscreen even on cloudy or foggy days. Keep in mind that UV rays reflect off water, sand, ice, snow and concrete.
- Choose a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher and one that blocks both UVA and UVB rays. Waterproof or water-resistant sunscreen provides longer protection even when swimming or sweating.
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes as well as the delicate skin around them.
- Wear long sleeved shirts, long pants and wide-brimmed hats to shade your body.
- Avoid tanning booths or salons.

To reduce pain and discomfort from sunburn:

- Take a cool shower or bath.
- Apply aloe vera lotion, moisturizing cream, or 1% hydrocortisone cream to the skin.

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2. Avoid smoking. Smoking decreases blood flow to the skin, speeds up the normal aging process and contributes to wrinkles.

3. Clean your skin regularly but gently
    - Use warm (not hot) water and take shorter shower/bath to reduce the loss of natural oils from your skin.
    - Use a mild soap or cleanser. Avoid deodorant, antibacterial, or perfumed soaps, which can dry and irritate your skin.
    - Use a cotton washcloth or soft sponge. Don't scrub too hard as the skin can become irritated.
    - Remove makeup before going to bed.

4. Moisturize generously. Apply a fragrance-free moisturizer right after washing or shaving to seal in moisture. Choose cream or oil instead of lotion if you have very dry skin.

5. Examine your skin monthly. Check your face and body (front and back) to look for warning signs of skin cancer. Contact your doctor right away if you find anything suspicious:
    - New or unusual growths
    - Changes in the color, size, shape of an existing mole
    - A sore that does not heal

Minor Skin Problems and Self-Care Tips

1. Dry, Itchy Skin Causes:
    - Very high or low temperatures with low humidity.
    - Prolonged exposure to air-conditioning or central heating.
    - Frequent showering, bathing or swimming.
    - Frequent contact with strong soaps, detergents, or other chemicals.

    Self-care tips:
    - Drink enough water to keep your body well hydrated.
    - Use a humidifier.
    - Limit bath time to less than 15 minutes and use cool water.
    - Wear gloves when doing the dishes or using any cleaning agents.
    - Use mild soaps and laundry detergents free of dyes or perfumes.
    - Apply moisturizing cream or lotion frequently especially after hand washing, bathing, or shaving.
    - Avoid wearing clothing made of wool or synthetic materials.
    - Avoid perfumes, cosmetics, or jewelry that can irritate the skin.
    - Use an over-the-counter cream containing 1% hydrocortisone or take an anti-histamine pill to help relieve severe itching. Don't scratch! Persistent scratching worsens the itch and can cause the skin to break and become infected.

2. Pimples and Clogged Pores Causes:
    - Excess production of oil and shedding of dead skin cells causing hair follicles to become plugged.
    - Hormonal changes in the body

    Self-care tips:
    - Wash your face with a gentle cleanser and warm water twice a day. Avoid scrubbing.
    - Try an over-the-counter acne lotion to reduce oil production and bacterial growth.
    - Keep your hair clean and away from your face.

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- Choose skin care products or cosmetics that do not clog pores.
- Don't squeeze or pop pimples! This can lead to infection or scarring.

Nothing can stop the natural aging process of the skin. However, there are ways to improve and maintain the health and appearance of your skin. If you are concerned about the condition of your skin or have a skin problem, talk to your doctor or a dermatologist (skin specialist). To learn more about healthy habits that can help you look and feel good, visit the CCHRC bilingual health website at **www.cchrchealth.org**

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