

Tips for Keeping Skin Healthy

Much of what we have learned about skin care over the past decades points to the importance of the interaction between your skin and the environment. Just as all living things are affected by their surroundings, so your skin is influenced by:

- stress
- diet
- exercise
- exposure to the sun
- make-up
- how well you take care of your skin

Your skin is your most visible organ and reflects your state of well-being. The basic characteristics of your skin are inherited from your parents and are reflected by its texture, elasticity, pore size, oiliness, and your degree of natural protection from the sun.

Seasonal Effects

Seasonal changes have a marked effect on your complexion. Winter's bitter cold and dry temperatures tend to dry the skin while the heat and humidity of summer causes the skin to become even more oily than usual. Both extremes are unhealthy for your skin.



In addition, air pollution is a year-round hazard that continuously exposes your skin to harmful particles and chemicals.

The key to maintaining a good complexion year-round is to adjust your skin care regimen to the seasonal conditions.

Winter (colder, drier air)

- Take care not to over wash your face; once in the morning and once in the evening is enough.
- Avoid alkaline deodorant soaps (Dial, Coast, Ivory, Camay, etc.). Instead use super-fatted soaps (Dove®, Tone®, Oil of Olay®, Cetaphil®, Neutrogena®, Aveeno®, etc.) and lukewarm water.
- Hot water tends to strip the skin of its natural protective oils and can lead to eczema.
- Limit your showering to once a day or once every other day, and protect your skin by moisturizing it regularly, and patting (not rubbing) yourself dry after bathing.



Moisturizing

- The best time to apply a moisturizer to the body is while the skin is still damp after bathing. The best time for the face is after it is gently, but thoroughly, dried. An effective moisturizer should be absorbed quickly and not leave a greasy residue.
- Products that contain *phospholipids* effectively relieve dry skin problems and may be helpful include Neutrogena®, Moisturel®, or Complex 15®.
- Products containing alpha hydroxy acids are also very effective (Aquaglycolic® face cream, Neutrogena Alpha Hydroxy® face cream, and Aquaglycolic® hand and body lotion, and Lac-Hydrin® cream and lotion).
- Use a moisturizing lotion for your face rather than a moisturizing cream. Oil-free products are best.



Diet

Contrary to popular belief, eating certain foods like chocolates, fried foods, nuts, caffeinated beverages, or dairy products such as ice cream, do not cause or aggravate skin problems such as acne.

Acne can be made worse, however, by eating large amounts of foods high in iodine such as shellfish and some table salts.

Everyone's skin is different and some individuals may find that certain foods may make their skin break out. The best advice for everyone's skin is to:



- drink plenty of fluids (about 6 to 8 glasses of water a day)
- eat a balanced diet
- avoid foods if you are sensitive to them

Cosmetics

Being careful about choosing and applying make-up can go a long way toward maintaining a healthy complexion and preventing the development of skin problems.

- Choose a make-up that agrees with your skin type and that does not encourage acne (look for words like *non-acnegenic* and *non-comedogenic*).
- Oil-free cosmetics are well tolerated by all skin types. While oil-based make-up tends to clog pores and encourage plugging of hair follicles, oil-free products have been tested and shown not to cause blemishes including blackheads and whiteheads. Generally, these also contain a high percentage of water, which also benefits your skin.
- Many types of make-up also contain **sunscreens**, which help maintain a healthy complexion. The best sunscreens are those that protect you from both



ultraviolet B (UVB) rays and **ultraviolet A (UVA)** rays. UVB rays are primarily those that lead to sunburns and eventual development of skin cancers; UVA rays are responsible for wrinkling and sagging of the skin. Although you may not find this type of broad-spectrum sunscreen available in make-up, many brands now contain sunscreens with an ultraviolet B sun protection factor of 15. This is helpful, but not adequate for daily use. If you plan to spend time outdoors, you should apply a broad- spectrum sunscreen before applying your make-up – one with an SPF of 30 or higher, such as Shade UVA Guard®, Neutrogena #17®, Ombrelle #30®, Durascreen #30®, Solbar AVO®, or PreSun Ultra 30®.

Other additives, sometimes considered “puffery,” pose a tougher challenge to the consumer. With the exception of colors and a small number of prohibited ingredients, cosmetic manufactures may use essentially any raw material in their products and market them without prior approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).



Among the more common ingredients is **aloe vera**, a topical cactus plant that has anti-inflammatory properties that have been recognized since before the time of Cleopatra. It is listed as an ingredient in many skin care products. It would take much more aloe vera than most of these cosmetic products contain, however, for the anti-inflammatory properties to work and it would be prohibitively expensive.

Collagen

There are many products on the market which claim that topically applied **collagen**, the protein substance found in the supporting structure of the skin, can lead to decreased wrinkling and increased youthfulness of the skin.

In skin care lotions and cosmetics, collagen has been proven to be an effective moisturizer. It binds water but it is not water soluble. There is no convincing evidence according to the FDA, however, that topically applied collagen can penetrate the skin and therefore no evidence that it has any effect below the surface on the supporting structure of the skin.

Skin care

The quest for maintaining a youthful appearance can best be achieved by establishing a healthy, balanced approach to skin care. Abuses from too much sun, poor skin care, improper diet and smoking can begin to take their toll by age 25.



Smoking has been shown to contribute to wrinkling of the skin both by the repeated sucking motion of the lips and crinkling of the eyes and by the restriction of blood flow to the skin, due to nicotine. In contrast, regular exercise helps to increase blood flow to the skin by enlarging the blood vessels that feed the skin, which helps to prevent premature wrinkling.

The key is moderation. Developing good skin care habits in your teens and early twenties will minimize problems you may encounter later in life and help maintain a healthy complexion.

Over-the-counter itch relief

The growing stock of itch-relief medications on the shelves may leave you confused about what product to pick for what problem. Hydrocortisone or benzocaine? Cream or ointment? Self-medicate or see a doctor?

The FDA has approved over-the-counter sales of products containing 1% hydrocortisone, a drug that relieves itching, skin irritations, rashes and minor inflammation. As a result of the FDA action, consumers can buy what used to be prescription-only strength hydrocortisone. Products with 0.5% hydrocortisone have been on the market since 1980. Used properly, these preparations will help relieve mild eczema, psoriasis, seborrheic dermatitis, external genital and anal itching, and contact dermatitis from soaps, cosmetics, jewelry, insect bites, and poison ivy, oak, and sumac.

If you know your skin irritation is caused by any of these problems, hydrocortisone can benefit you. It is among the safest and most effective medications. **Hydrocortisone products, however, should not be used for itching caused by bacterial or fungal infections**, such as athlete's foot. Talk to your doctor if you are not sure of the cause of your skin problems, or if your skin condition does not clear up within 1 week.