



### Dry Skin

**Fact:**

Water makes skin stay supple, and a substance called sebum keeps it that way.

**Fiction:**

It's a myth that babies are immune from dry skin.

**Prevention:**

Bathing less often, and with less scrubbing, can help.

**Treatment:**

Moisturizers and petroleum jelly may soften skin.

Normal skin stays supple thanks to its water content. When skin becomes dry, it can thicken, crack and even bleed.

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### Understanding Dry Skin

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Skin feels soft and pliable when its top layer contains at least 10% water. At least 20 to 35% is better. The skin's sebaceous glands produce an oily substance called sebum that protects the skin against water evaporation with a mixture of fatty acids, sugars, waxes and other natural chemicals. Factors that deplete the skin's layer of sebum make the skin lose water and feel dry. Dry skin is also called xerosis.

In the United States, dry skin generally results from:\*

- Decreased sebum production due to a decreasing number of sebaceous glands in the skin with age. Aging also causing blood flow to the skin to decrease.
- Loss of existing sebum, usually caused by lifestyle factors including excessive washing or scrubbing of the skin, or harsh soaps. Athletes who shower frequently may get dry skin over the entire body, while those who must wash hands frequently may only have dry hands.
- Environmental conditions including desert climates, dry winter air in the northern United States or exposure to swimming pool chemicals
- Certain illnesses including diabetes, allergies, thyroid or kidney problems

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### Who Gets Dry Skin?

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Dry skin is a very common problem in modern societies and can affect people of all ages, including babies.

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### Symptoms of Dry Skin

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In addition to dryness, dry skin may itch, flake and be slightly more wrinkled than normal. Symptoms may worsen during the winter months with dry, heated air.

A doctor should be consulted if: \*

- Dry skin doesn't respond to moisturizing
- Severe itching interferes with work or sleep
- Dry skin cracks and bleeds, or becomes red, swollen and painful

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## Prevention and Treatment

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Dry skin can be both prevented and treated if a person:

- Bathes quickly only once a day, avoiding scrubbing, using warm rather than hot water and using a soap with a high fat or glycerin content
- While the skin is still wet from bathing, applies a moisturizer that contains one or more of the following ingredients: glycerin, urea, pyroglutamic acid, sorbitol, lactic acid, lactate salts or alpha hydroxy acids
- Covers exposed skin when outdoors and applies a light layer of petroleum jelly before entering a pool
- Uses a humidifier to increase the moisture in dry air
- Avoids drying products including antiperspirants and perfumes

Treatment usually improves dry skin within a week or two.

\* IntelliHealth

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