

Dry Skin

Description

- Dry skin is usually scaly and white, and often becomes itchy.
- Some areas of dry, itchy skin may become thickened and slightly red. This is called eczema.
- Dry skin and eczema are most common in older patients and patients with allergic problems (for example, hay fever or asthma).

The causes

- Our skin loses moisture easily if it is not covered with a layer of oil. This oil (sebum) comes from glands in our skin called sebaceous glands (the same glands that cause acne!)
- Washing away this oil with hot, soapy water is one cause of dry skin.
- The drier air that occurs in winter is another common cause.
- As our skin ages it is less able to hold on to moisture; therefore, advanced age is also a cause.
- Scratching makes dry skin irritated, thickened and red.
- Many substances make dryness, irritation or itching worse. (For example: soap, wool, some skin lotions, alcohol, witch hazel, etc.)

Basic remedies

- Avoid hot showers.
- Don't use soap (for example, Ivory); use a gentle cleansing bar instead (for example, Dove for Sensitive Skin or Cetaphil). Only wash dirty areas (groin, underarms; not arms or legs).
- Apply a moisturizer (for example, Acid Mantel cream, Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion, Lubriderm or Eucerin cream) to your skin within 2 or 3 minutes of exiting the shower – before your skin dries out.
- Avoid anti-itch creams with the ingredient *pramoxine*.
- Wear cotton next to your skin and avoid wool.

More potent remedies (if basic remedies aren't working)

- Use a moisturizer mentioned above 2 or 3 times a day.
- Apply hydrocortisone 1% cream (available over-the-counter) to itchy or red areas once or twice a day. (It is OK to mix it with the lubricant.)
- Take Benadryl (25 mg – one or two pills) at night to stop the itch – one hour before bed.

Prescription remedies (see your doctor)

- Potent steroid: _____. Apply this to the worst areas two times a day until they clear up. (Do not use on face or genitals.)
- Maintenance moisturizer: _____. Apply this twice a day (including just after your shower or bath) every day, during those times of the year when you typically get dry skin.
- Anti-itch medication: _____. Take this one-hour before bed to help stop the itching and scratching.
- If you can't stop scratching, try covering the itchiest areas with Saran Wrap at night (after you've applied the potent steroid). You can also wear mittens or gloves to bed.