

CARE OF DRY SKIN: PROTECTING AND STRENGTHENING THE SKIN BARRIER

Rajani Katta MD

www.KattaMD.com

The following recommendations will help protect the skin from habits (such as long, hot showers) and substances (such as harsh soaps or fragranced laundry detergent) that can irritate the skin. Using the right type of moisturizer, in the right way, can also help strengthen the skin barrier, which is very important when you are dealing with dry skin or dermatitis.

1. When bathing, use lukewarm water only. Avoid extremes of hot or cold water.
2. Use a mild soap, such as Aveeno fragrance free bar soap, Neutrogena fragrance free bar soap, or Vanicream bar soap [call 1-800-325-8232 for stores near you]. Liquid soap options include Free and Clear liquid cleanser and Cerave foaming cleanser. For very dry skin or dermatitis, you may also consider a soapless cleanser such as Cetaphil gentle skin cleanser (liquid) or Cerave hydrating cleanser (liquid). (These do not foam, but they do cleanse). In general, soap does not need to be applied to all body surfaces; you may just apply to face, groin and underarms.
3. Limit bathing time to under 15 minutes.
4. Immediately after bathing, pat with a towel, and while skin is still damp apply a moisturizer to the skin. Ointments are the most moisturizing, but may be greasy. The following examples do not contain some of the most common triggers of allergic skin reactions, and would be good options for most people. Some persons, however, may need additional testing to determine which skin care products are appropriate for them. Examples of ointments are Vaseline petroleum jelly and Theraplex emollient [theraplex.com]. Creams are very good moisturizers, for example Cerave cream or Aveeno Eczema Therapy cream. Lotions are the least moisturizing, and are usually not recommended for persons with dermatitis since they're not strong enough. When applied after bathing, moisturizing creams and ointments help to "lock in moisture." These should also be applied as needed during the day.
5. If prescribed topical steroids for dermatitis, the medication should always be applied first, with the moisturizer applied over the medication. As the dermatitis begins to improve, the medication may be tapered off, but the regular use of moisturizers should continue.
6. Avoid the use of anything that might irritate or inflame sensitive skin. This includes cleansers with scrubs, bubble bath, washcloths, brushes, loofahs, or perfumed products.
7. Use fragrance-free and dye-free laundry detergents. If necessary, consider double-rinsing clothing. Examples include All Free and Clear, Tide Free, and Cheer Free.
8. Wear appropriate clothing. Rough, tight, wool, or new clothing may be irritating.
9. Heating in the house contributes to dry skin. A humidifier is helpful.