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What to do about dry skin

Your skin maintains its smooth, soft appearance due to the water content of the outer layer cells. These cells are like sponges, they can hold a lot of water. To keep the water from evaporating from these cells, your skin makes oil to form a protective layer, just like a piece of plastic wrap around a sandwich keeps the bread from drying out. In the winter when humidity is reduced, water evaporates more readily from your skin cells leading to dryness, flaking, irritation around the hair follicles of the thighs and arms occasionally to redness, itching, and general discomfort. Therefore, the first thing to do for dry skin is to establish a good oil layer. Most important is to leave your natural oils in place. Soap is very efficient at fold areas. Use super fatted soaps, which are not as efficient at removing oils or soap substitutes.

Examples

super fatted soaps: Basis, Dove, Olay, Neutrogena, and Cetaphil

Non-soap liquid cleansers: Neutrogena, Cetaphil, CeraVe, Vanicream

The rinsing action of a shower removes more oil from the skin than a bath. A bath is a more effective method of allowing the skin to soak up water. It takes the skin about 15 minutes submerged in water to soak up a sufficient amount of water to counteract severe dryness indicated by "prune fingers". It takes only 30 minutes for this water to evaporate again. Therefore, to trap the water absorbed in showers and baths, it is helpful to apply oil, occlusive cream or emollient lotion to the still damp skin. Occlusive creams are usually preferred if your skin is very dry (lotions are diluted creams). Avoid "medicated" and scented preparations as they may contain ingredients that will irritate dry skin.

Examples

***Bath Oils:** Alpha Keri Oil, Neutrogena Sesame Oil, Baby Oil, Olive Oil*

***Lotions:** Cetaphil Lotion, CeraVe Lotion, Curel Lotion, Vanicream Lotion*

***Occlusive Creams:** Cetaphil Cream, Aveeno Cream, CeraVe Cream
Eucerin Cream, Vanicream Cream*

Lips: To prevent chapped lips, follow much the same procedure. A wax chapstick (unflavored or unscented) is preferable to creams or lotions. Wax prevents evaporation of water and also protects the skin from saliva and foods which act as irritants. Lips that are already dry and cracked can be very difficult to treat because of secondary infections from bacteria of the mouth and constant irritation from saliva. When lips are chapped, apply warm water compresses to them for approximately 15 minutes; then apply chapstick or plain Vaseline. See a physician if this does not improve.

Hands: Minimize hand washing and avoid irritating the thin skin on the back of the hands by washing only the fingertips. Do not apply soap to red, cracked, irritated skin. Moisturize hands immediately after cleansing. An occlusive cream is best used to moisturize hands.

Acne areas: Use lipid free products only. Look for products designed for the face and say "oil-free", "non-acnegenic" or "non-comedogenic". Examples are: Neutrogena facial moisturizer, Purpose, Cetaphil, CeraVe.