

Dry skin

Overview:

- Dry skin is a very common skin condition that occurs at all ages, in which the skin loses its moisture.
- Itching is one of the most common symptoms of dry skin.
- Dry skin is often temporary, but it may be a lifelong condition.
- In most cases, dry skin is treated with lifestyle changes, ointments, creams or medical moisturizers.
- The best way to prevent dry skin is by avoiding exposure to cold weather, hot water and applying moisturizers.

Introduction:

Dry skin is a very common skin condition that occurs at all ages. It is characterized by red itchy skin that tends to crack and peel due to loss of moisture. It commonly affects the arms, legs, and feet. A person may develop dry skin naturally, due to a variety of reasons, and its severity varies from person to person.

The skin:

Skin has three layers:

- The outermost layer of skin (the epidermis).
- The middle layer of skin (the dermis).
- The fat layer of skin (the hypodermis) which contains adipose tissue, nerves and hair follicles.

Other names:

Xerosis

Cause:

The skin's sebaceous glands produce a natural oil called "sebum". This oily substance forms a protective barrier on the surface of the skin to prevent it from losing its moisture. So if the skin does not produce sufficient amounts of this oily substance, it loses moisture and becomes dehydrated. There is no single cause for dry skin, but it is often attributed to environmental factors.

Risk factors:

- Ageing.
- Winter and autumn.
- Menopause.
- Hypothyroidism.
- Chronic kidney disease.
- Malnutrition and weight loss.
- Skin conditions (such as: eczema and psoriasis).
- Some medicines (e.g. diuretics and others).
- Direct heat.
- Frequent use of hot water.
- Excessive bathing.
- Using certain types of soaps and detergents.

Symptoms:

Dry skin is often temporary, but it may be a lifelong condition. Signs and symptoms of dry skin depend on several factors (such as: age, overall health, and others). Symptoms may include:

- Skin that feels and looks rough
- Redness and Itching.
- Hard white scales.
- Fine lines or cracks.
- Gray, ashy skin.
- Deep cracks that may bleed.

When to see a doctor:

- Dry skin is accompanied by redness.
- Open sores or infections.
- Dryness that spreads to other parts of the body.

Complications:

- Atopic dermatitis (eczema).
- Inflammation and infections.

Diagnosis:

- Medical history.
- A physical examination that involves questions about the patient's bathing habits, diet, and skin care routine.
- Certain diagnostic tests to check whether dry skin is the result of an underlying medical condition, such as: hypothyroidism).

Treatment:

In most cases, dry skin is treated with lifestyle changes, (such as: using moisturizers and avoiding long, hot showers and baths. The doctor may also recommend nonprescription creams and lotions. If you have a more serious skin disease, such as atopic dermatitis, ichthyosis or psoriasis, the doctor may prescribe prescription creams and ointments or other treatments.

Prevention:

- Stay hydrated and apply moisturizing creams and ointments.
- Limit your exposure to hot water while bathing.
- Keep bath and shower time to 10 minutes or less.
- Limit your use of scented soaps and creams.
- Apply moisturizing oils directly after bathing.
- Avoid rubbing or scratching the skin to prevent aggravating the symptoms.
- Wear gloves, hats, and scarves if the weather is cold.
- Wear rubber gloves when using harsh cleansers.
- Get shorter showers in lukewarm water.
- Wear clothes made from natural cotton or silk to allow the skin to breathe.
- It is preferable to wash clothes with unscented detergents to avoid irritating the skin.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.
- Apply cold compresses to the dry area if it feels itchy.
- Quit smoking.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **Is dry skin a medical condition or does it simply indicate that the body needs more fluids?**

Dry skin can be due to a medical condition, or it can be due to lack of sufficient fluids in the body.

- **Is it advisable to rub the body if the dry skin starts to peel?**

This is not recommended and it's preferable to see a doctor.

Misconceptions:

- **Are there certain foods that specifically affect skin moisture?**

Fact: High-water-content foods such as vegetables and fruits, can help keep your skin moisturized.

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