



SAINT LOUIS
UNIVERSITY

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Dry Skin

- **Dry skin is a result of water loss, not oil deficiency.** Drinking at least 8 glasses of water per day has many benefits, but (contrary to popular belief) does not prevent dry skin.
- **Dry skin is easily irritated and more susceptible to itching, allergic rashes and infection.**
- **The best way to hydrate the skin is by soaking it in water.** Soaking softens skin and nails, making them easier to cut. Bathing also removes dead skin cells and germs, and is a great way to relax. How often to take a bath is a matter of opinion and personal preference, but the importance of using a moisturizer immediately after bathing is well-recognized.

Some people like to add colloidal oatmeal to the bath water. "Colloidal" refers to a finely ground powder that can remain suspended in water. Colloidal oatmeal is sold as Aveeno Soothing Bath Treatment® but it can be made at home by grinding whole oats in a food processor or blender. The usual dose is 2 cups of colloidal oatmeal in a tub of lukewarm water. The fiber in oatmeal absorbs excess water and helps deposit it on the skin surface. Bath oils are not as effective and can increase the risk of falls by making the tub slippery.
- **Select mild cleansing products, use sparingly and rinse well.** Soap is made from lye and irritates sensitive skin. Liquid cleansers and superfatted soaps are less irritating. Allergic rashes from cleansing products are uncommon because they are quickly rinsed off, in contrast to fragrance and preservatives in moisturizers that are left on the skin. However, popular degreasing agents, **cocamidopropyl betaine and laurel betaine**, are not easily rinsed off, and can cause allergic eczema. Safer cleansing alternatives are: Cetaphil Gentle Cleansing Lotion, Aquanil Lotion or Vanicream bar soap. Safer shampoos are Free and Clear and Loprox.
- **Use a bland moisturizer liberally and frequently.** Moisturizers are not absorbed, and do not add oil to the skin. They sit on the skin and act as a barrier to prevent evaporation of water from the skin surface. Moisturizers are most effective when applied to damp skin after bathing.
- **Plain petroleum jelly or mineral oil are the safest, most effective and least costly moisturizers.** The greasy texture that gives these products their beneficial effect, is unpleasant for many people. Manufacturers of cosmeceuticals are well-aware of this "tactile aversion", and spend millions of dollars to create products that people prefer. These products smell better, feel better and are packaged in a more appealing way. But they are much more expensive, less effective, have a higher risk of irritation and can trigger allergic rashes and itching.
- **Optimize the humidity in your environment.** Furnace-heated air can reduce the humidity level to less than 10%. Setting your thermostat too high will not only dry the air, but can also dilate blood vessels and promote itch. Cooler air can act as a mild anesthetic. A whole house humidifier is an effective way to can add moisture to the air. The optimal setting is 25 to 45% humidity. Vaporizers are less effective and require frequent cleaning to minimize the risk of contamination with germs.
- **To temporarily relieve itch:** apply a simple over-the-counter medication containing pramoxine (e.g. 1% Pramoxone ointment). Store the medication in the refrigerator and apply it cold for a more soothing effect. An antihistamine (e.g. Benadryl) may help promote sleep.