

NEW ENGLAND DERMATOLOGY  
&  
LASER CENTER

## HOW YOU CAN PREVENT DRY SKIN

### **Q: What causes dry skin:**

A: Dryness can result from any number of things that remove water from the skin. Skin care products, weather, and bathing habits are the biggest offenders. Additionally, use of waterbed, electric heating blanket, hot tub, swimming pools, wood stoves, or anything else which will reduce environmental humidity will promote dry skin.

Products you use to care for your face can actually make it drier. Astringents and alcohol – found in clarifying lotions, aftershaves, and splash-on fragrances, among other things – are drying agents. Scrubbing brushes and granular soaps can hurt the face too. “Pure” soaps may be called that because they do not contain additives such as moisturizers. You should replace these drying soaps with soaps having built-in moisturizers, soapless cleansers, such as Cetaphil, or ones recommended by dermatologists for people with dry or sensitive skin.

Cold, wind, hot sun, and low humidity all dry out the skin. Although many people complain of dry skin only in the winter, others have summer dryness as well. Swimming may contribute to the problem, because the chlorine in pools and salt in ocean waters can irritate the skin. Lying in the hot sun causes loss of water through evaporation.

Bathing habits may be the most common cause of dry skin. Hot water and prolonged bathing are taboo if dryness is a problem.

### **Q: How should I change my bathing habits?**

A: Bathe in warm – not hot – water, and limit your bath or shower to 5 minutes. Wash with a moisture-containing soap and one made for sensitive skin. If you like to use bath oil, add it to the water after – not before – you’ve soaked for a minute or two. Your skin will have absorbed some water already, and the oil will seal it in.

Pat yourself dry with a towel immediately after you finish bathing. Don’t towel vigorously. Waiting too long to dry off will allow the water that has filled your cells to evaporate. As soon as you’ve patted yourself dry, apply moisturizer to lock in the water your skin soaked up during the bath or shower.

### **Q: How should I use moisturizer?**

A: Always apply a moisturizer after bathing. Keep a bottle of lotion near the sink so you can use it after washing your hands.

Many people prefer to use lotions and creams during the day, because they are the least greasy. Ointments provide better moisture coverage, but use may be limited to nighttime.

If you are prone to acne, talk to your dermatologist before selection a moisturizer. Some moisturizers have been found to be comedogenic; they tend to cause acne or make it worse.

Don’t get carried away with too many moisturizing treatments. The more products you use on your skin, the greater the risk of reaction to something and being unable to identify the cause.

Some people overuse moisturizers to prevent dry skin and wrinkles. Moisturizers work only in the immediate period, to seal water into the skin. They can prevent and improve dry skin today and tomorrow, but not many years down the road.

While you’re thinking about moisturizing your skin, don’t forget to add moisture to your environment. If your home is dry, use a room humidifier to increase the moisture content of the air surrounding your skin. More water is lost through evaporation in dry air than in moist air.

## DRY SKIN DOS AND DON'TS

### DON'T

Don't take hot showers or baths

Don't take long showers or baths

Don't put bath oil in the tub while it's filling

Don't towel vigorously

Don't leave the bathroom without applying moisturizer.

Don't wash with a "pure" or granular soap

Don't use astringents or alcohol-based products

Don't use too many creams or ointments

Don't use moisturizers if you have acne without talking to your doctor

Don't "air dry" after bathing or swimming

Don't forget to shower after swimming

Don't stay in dry air 24 hours a day

### DO

Do bathe or shower in warm water

Do limit bathing time to 5 minutes per day.

Do add bath oil after your skin has soaked up some water

Do pat yourself dry after bathing

Do put on moisturizer right after bathing. Use lotion after washing your hands.

Do use a soap with moisturizer or one for sensitive skin

Do read labels on toiletries, and avoid those with alcohol.

Do limit your skin cream collection to one or two products

Do ask your dermatologist to recommend a noncomedogenic moisturizer (one that won't make acne worse)

Do towel dry when you get out of the bath or pool

Do rinse off chlorine and salt water

Do humidify your home in the winter, or year-round if you live in a dry climate