

Healthy Living Newsletter

A MedWatch publication to keep you healthy and informed.

Staying Healthy in the Winter



November is National Healthy Skin Month!

The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) designates each November as National Healthy Skin Month. It's a time to pay attention to your skin, learn about skin care, and adopt habits that can lead to a lifetime of healthier skin, hair, and nails. The AAD launched the first National Healthy Skin Month in November 1997.

Your Amazing Skin!

Your skin is a big deal – literally. It's the largest organ in the body and one of the most complicated. It has many roles in the maintenance of life and health, but also has many potential problems, with more than 3,000 possible skin disorders.

Not only does the skin hold everything in, but it also plays a crucial role in providing an airtight, watertight, and flexible barrier between the outside world and the highly regulated systems within the body. It also helps with temperature regulation, immune defense, vitamin production, and sensation.

The Structure of the Skin

The skin is divided into three layers known as the epidermis, dermis, and subcutis (hypodermis). These layers are well defined but together they allow the skin to function effectively.

The epidermis is the outermost, cellular layer of the skin which varies in thickness depending on the body site. On average it's less than half a millimeter thick. The epidermis resembles a "brick wall" of cells known as keratinocytes, which are bound tightly together and act to prevent free movement of moisture, pathogens, and chemicals into or out of the body. The epidermal cells also develop hair follicles, sweat glands, and oil glands. The small ducts from each of these glands open onto the skin surface. Sweat and sebum (oil) provide an antibacterial and protective barrier on the skin.

The dermis lies beneath the epidermis and is 20-30 times thicker. It's made up of a dense layer of fibrous and elastic tissue. The dermis gives the skin its integrity, strength, and elasticity; and houses blood vessels, glands, and hair follicles, as well as nerves and their receptors.

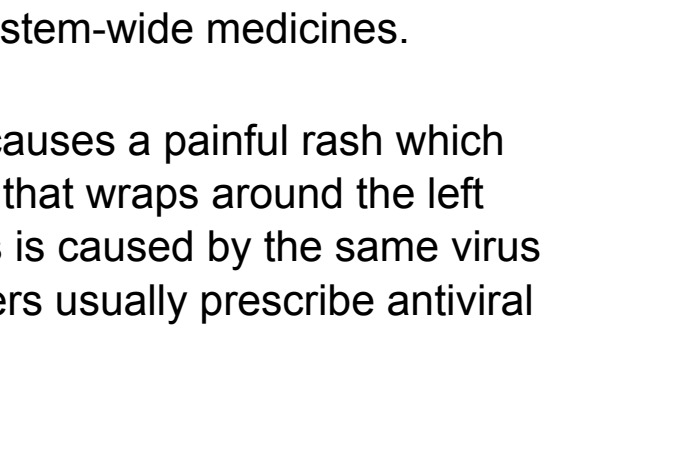
Beneath the dermis lies **the subcutis (hypodermis)**, a specialized layer of fat and fibrous tissue. The thickness of this layer varies dramatically depending on the site and a person's body shape and weight. It cushions the body from external trauma, insulates from the cold, and stores energy in the form of fat.

The Function of the Skin

The extraordinary array of functions performed by healthy skin is still coming to light. The basic day-to-day functions include:

- **Working as a barrier** – protecting against water loss as well as physical and chemical injury.
- **Supporting immune defense** – fighting off bugs, allergens, toxins, and carcinogens through the immune system in our skin.
- **Maintaining body temperature** – regulating heat by dilating or constricting blood vessels, producing sweat, and insulating with erect hairs on the skin's surface.
- **Making new skin** – the epidermis continually makes new skin cells. These new cells replace the approximately 40,000 old skin cells that your body sheds every day. You have new skin every 30 days.
- **Shielding against UV radiation** – producing melanin which provides pigmentation to your skin, eyes, and hair. This substance also absorbs harmful rays and protects cells from sun damage.
- **Giving us the sense of touch** – providing interaction with physical surroundings, allowing all fine and gross motor activities, and allowing pleasurable and sexual stimulation.
- **Supporting overall health** – producing Vitamin D to help prevent diseases like osteoporosis, cancer, heart disease, obesity, and neurological disorders.
- **Wound healing** – your skin plays an important role in repairing cuts and abrasions by producing collagen fibers.
- **Beauty and physical attraction** – the quality and condition of the skin greatly contribute to the perception of health, wellness, youth, and beauty.

10 Common Skin Conditions and Their Treatments



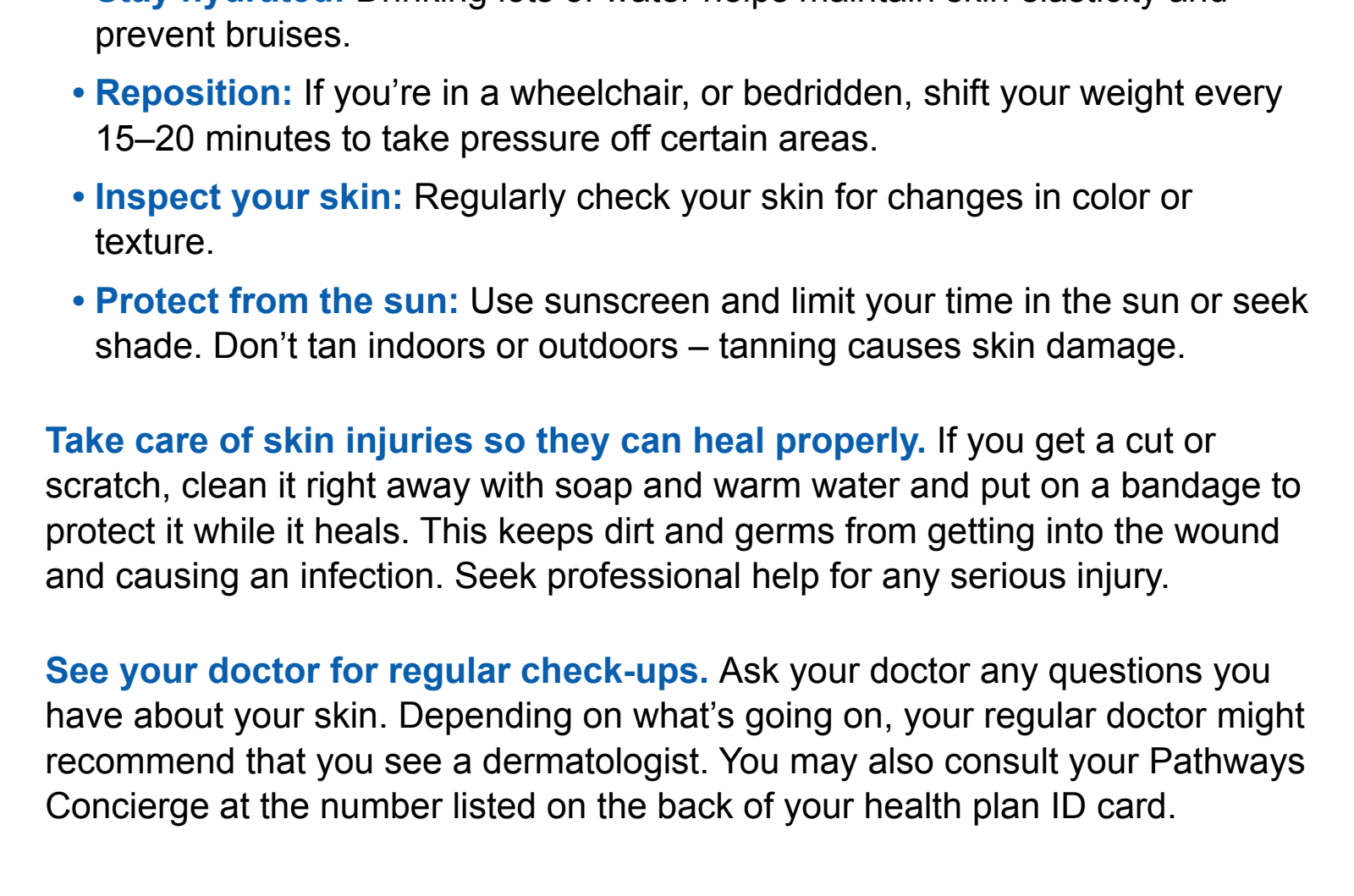
Your skin—the body's biggest organ—shields you from the elements. However, you can sometimes still develop skin conditions or various problems with your skin. Some common skin conditions include eczema, psoriasis, hives, and vitiligo. Skin issues can generally be unsightly but harmless; however, they can be contagious, itchy, painful, or a combination of those features. Here's what else you need to know about 10 common skin conditions, including treatment options and when to see a healthcare provider.

- 1. Acne.** Acne occurs when oil and dead skin cells clog the pores. Pimples under the skin's surface that erupt with a white center are called whiteheads. Pimples exposed to air are called blackheads and look black. Treatment options include topical medications, diet changes, oral medications, and laser or light therapy.
- 2. Cellulitis.** When bacteria infect skin layers and tissue below the skin, cellulitis is the likely diagnosis. Skin affected by cellulitis may be red, swollen, tender, and feel warm to the touch. The main treatment for cellulitis is an antibiotic.
- 3. Cold Sore.** A viral infection usually causes cold sores, or fever blisters, which are contagious. Cold sores are tiny, painful, fluid-filled blisters and often appear in clusters on or around the lips. There is no cure for cold sores, though antiviral medications can speed recovery.
- 4. Dry Skin.** Dry skin is the result of your skin losing its moisture, usually due to environmental factors like low humidity or spending time exposed to high heat. In some cases, dry skin can result in flaky, rough skin or skin that cracks or itches. Regular use of moisturizers helps heal and hydrate your skin.
- 5. Eczema.** Eczema is a dry, itchy skin condition that can occur anywhere; it can also cause certain types of blistering. The condition may be chronic, but it's not contagious. Eczema treatments may include antihistamines, light therapy, steroids, and topical medicines.
- 6. Hives.** Hives are itchy, raised welts that can be red or skin-colored. About 20% of people experience hives at some point in their lives. Many cases occur due to an allergic reaction. Possible triggers include foods, insect bites, latex exposure, pet dander, medications, and viral infections. Healthcare providers often recommend antihistamines to block or reduce the body's allergic response and ease itching.
- 7. Lupus.** Lupus is an autoimmune condition, meaning the body attacks its own tissues and organs. Lupus can affect many parts of the body, so people with lupus can have various symptoms, which include fever, fatigue, sensitivity to the sun, hair loss, headaches, and abdominal pain. There is no cure for lupus. However, treatments such as anti-inflammatory drugs, corticosteroids, and immunosuppressants can help manage symptoms and prevent flares.
- 8. Psoriasis.** Psoriasis is a skin condition related to skin cell development. When a person has psoriasis, their body makes skin cells quicker than normal, resulting in silvery-white flakes that appear most commonly on the elbows, knees, lower back, and scalp. Psoriasis is most commonly treated with topical medicines, light therapy, and system-wide medicines.
- 9. Shingles.** Shingles is a viral infection that causes a painful rash which typically looks like a single stripe of blisters that wraps around the left side or the right side of your torso. Shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. Healthcare providers usually prescribe antiviral medicines to treat shingles.
- 10. Ringworm.** Ringworm is a fungal skin infection that can be itchy. Ringworm appears as a round patch with a clear center on many areas of the skin. Despite its name, ringworm is not caused by a worm. Ringworm of the feet, known as athlete's foot, causes peeling, cracking, and possibly blisters. Ringworm is contagious, but treatable with antifungal medicines.

When to See a Healthcare Provider

You'll want to see a board-certified dermatologist or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about your skin. You'll also want to consult a healthcare provider if you:

- Experience other symptoms like fever, fatigue, or shortness of breath alongside skin symptoms
- Have rashes that are painful, blistering, or infected
- Have skin problems that don't go away or worsen



Don't Fall for These Skin Care Myths

Think you know a lot about skin care? You might be surprised at how much "common knowledge" about keeping your skin clear and healthy is simply not true. Here, we debunk 10 common myths about skin.

Myth: Acne is caused by dirt and oil. The truth is that an oily substance called sebum causes acne. It's made and secreted by the skin. In fact, there is little evidence that acne is caused by surface dirt, oil, or any specific foods, such as chocolate.

Myth: The higher the SPF of your sunscreen, the better. Above a certain level, a higher sun protection factor (SPF) has little added benefit compared with a lower SPF. Experts generally recommend using sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, which blocks out 97% of UVB radiation.

Myth: Black skin doesn't need sunscreen. This is a common myth. Everyone should wear sunscreen to protect their skin from UVB radiation.

Myth: Sunscreen blocks vitamin D absorption. Sunscreen doesn't block all the sun's rays, so your body can still absorb vitamin D even if you're wearing sunscreen.

Myth: Skin tans can protect against sunburns. This is one skincare myth that can have some serious consequences. A suntan does the opposite of protecting your skin – it leaves you vulnerable to the signs of aging and increases your risk of skin cancer.

Myth: Makeup causes acne. Makeup doesn't cause acne, but not removing it properly at the end of the day can lead to problems.

Myth: Oily skin doesn't need moisture. Oily skin still needs hydration and skipping moisturizer can cause your skin to produce even more oil.

Myth: More exfoliation is better. Exfoliating too much can be bad for your skin, and physical scrubs can cause micro-tears.

Myth: Sunscreen contains harmful chemicals. Some lab studies suggest that sunscreen chemicals may cause skin allergies or mimic hormones, but no studies have conclusively established health problems in people.

Myth: Vitamin E will make scars fade. There's little evidence to support this claim. Talk to your surgeon or dermatologist if you have concerns about the appearance of a scar. There may be options for improving the appearance of scars, including laser treatments.

In Pursuit of Healthier Skin

People say that beauty's only skin deep and it's what's on the "inside" that counts. While our insides are certainly important, your skin is your first layer of defense against the outside world. Learn to take good care of your skin, so your skin can keep taking good care of you. Here are some tips on keeping your skin healthy.

Keep your skin clean and hydrated. Washing your skin, especially your hands, is very important to keep it healthy. Hand washing keeps you from spreading germs to other parts of your body. It also keeps you from spreading germs that could give others a cold or the flu.

Protect your skin from the sun. Melanin – the pigment that gives skin color – provides some protection by absorbing the sun's harmful rays, but it doesn't protect the skin completely. Too much sun can damage your skin, no matter how light or dark your skin is. Stay in the shade when the sun is the strongest during the day. Whenever you are outside, wear protective clothing or wear sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.

Avoid skin injuries. Skin injuries include cuts, punctures, scrapes, burns, bug bites, stings, rashes, and pressure injuries. Injury prevention is an important component in safeguarding your general health. Here are some ways to prevent skin injuries:

- **Avoid hazards:** Keep away from sharp objects, fire, and hot water. Remove or replace tripping hazards, and make sure electrical cords are safe.
- **Wear protective equipment:** When participating in activities that could cause skin injuries, wear the appropriate protective clothing and equipment. For example, work gloves, bike helmets, footwear, brimmed hats, and shin guards can all help protect us from injury.
- **Practice good hygiene:** Bathe regularly with mild soap, and pat dry instead of rubbing.
- **Eat well:** A healthy diet with enough vitamins and minerals can help keep skin firm and less likely to be injured.
- **Stay hydrated:** Drinking lots of water helps maintain skin elasticity and prevent bruises.
- **Reposition:** If you're in a wheelchair, or bedridden, shift your weight every 15–20 minutes to take pressure off certain areas.
- **Inspect your skin:** Regularly check your skin for changes in color or texture.
- **Protect from the sun:** Use sunscreen and limit your time in the sun or seek shade. Don't tan indoors or outdoors – tanning causes skin damage.

Take care of skin injuries so they can heal properly. If you get a cut or scratch, clean it right away with soap and warm water and put on a bandage to protect it while it heals. This keeps dirt and germs from getting into the wound and causing an infection. Seek professional help for any serious injury.

See your doctor for regular check-ups. Ask your doctor any questions you have about your skin. Depending on what's going on, your regular doctor might recommend that you see a dermatologist. You may also consult your Pathways Concierge at the number listed on the back of your health plan ID card.

Nutrition Corner Foods That Promote Healthy Skin

Many foods contain vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that can help improve your skin's health. Plant-based foods – such as vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, and beans – are especially rich in skin-supporting nutrients. And studies show that they can actually help improve skin elasticity and hydration and may even help reduce the appearance of wrinkles.

There's no one "superfood" for skin health. Instead, it's your overall dietary pattern that matters. Enjoying a mostly plant-based diet, along with eating oily fish in moderation, is the best way to support healthy skin. Here are 10 foods that support skin health.

- 1. Fatty fish.** Some people with skin issues stay away from fatty foods. However, it is important to note that not all fats are the same. Cold-water fatty fish, including herring, sardines, and salmon, may benefit the skin, as they are abundant sources of omega-3 fatty acids, which studies suggest reduces the risk of non-melanoma skin cancers.
- 2. Walnuts.** Nuts may provide the same benefits as fatty fish, making them a great addition to the diet, especially for vegans and vegetarians. Walnuts are among the richest sources of both omega-3 and omega-6 unsaturated fatty acids. Other nuts and seeds rich in protective fatty acids include almonds, sunflower seeds, and flax seeds.
- 3. Sweet potatoes.** Beta carotene is a nutrient found in plants such as oranges, carrots, spinach, and sweet potatoes. Carotenoids like beta carotene help keep your skin healthy by acting as a natural sunblock. When consumed, this antioxidant is incorporated into your skin and helps protect your skin cells from sun exposure. This may help prevent sunburn, cell death, and dry, wrinkled skin.
- 4. Red or yellow bell peppers.** Like sweet potatoes, bell peppers are an excellent source of beta-carotene, which your body converts into vitamin A. They're also one of the best sources of vitamin C, which is necessary for creating the protein collagen, which keeps skin firm and strong.
- 5. Broccoli.** Broccoli is full of many vitamins and minerals important for skin health, including zinc, vitamin A, and vitamin C. It also contains lutein, a carotenoid that works like beta-carotene. Lutein helps protect your skin from oxidative damage, which can cause your skin to become dry and wrinkled.
- 6. Tomatoes.** Tomatoes are a great source of vitamin C and contain all of the major carotenoids, including lycopene. These carotenoids protect your skin from sun damage and may prevent wrinkling.
- 7. Soy.** Soy contains isoflavones, a category of plant compounds that have been shown to improve wrinkles, collagen, skin elasticity, and skin dryness, as well as protect your skin from UV damage.
- 8. Avocados.** Avocados are rich in healthy fats and vitamin E, which support the health of the skin. They also pack compounds that may protect your skin from sun damage.
- 9. Dark chocolate.** If you need one more reason to eat chocolate, here it is: the effects of cocoa on your skin are real. Cacao is rich in antioxidants and minerals that have an anti-inflammatory effect on the skin.
- 10. Green tea.** The powerful compounds found in green tea are called catechins, antioxidants that can protect your skin against sun damage and reduce redness, as well as improve its hydration, thickness, and elasticity.

11. Water. Water supports the functioning of every system in the body, and it benefits the skin in many ways. For example, staying hydrated protects skin cells from damage, including damage caused by environmental factors. Also, hydration makes it easier for skin cells to absorb nutrients and release toxins.

12. Carotene and beta-carotene. Antioxidants called carotenoids have many health benefits, including protecting the skin from damage caused by free radicals and overexposure to the sun. Vibrant green, yellow, orange, or red fruits and vegetables are often rich sources of these protective antioxidants. These same antioxidants also improve skin thickness, hydration, blood flow, and skin texture.

The bottom line: What you eat can significantly affect your skin health. Make sure you're getting enough essential nutrients to protect your skin. The foods on this list are great options to keep your skin healthy, strong, and attractive.

Thank you for subscribing to MedWatch's Healthy Living Newsletter! We hope you enjoyed the content and found it to be a valuable resource.

For more information and additional resources, reach out to your Pathways Concierge team at the number on your Health Plan ID card.