

## **SIMPLE WAYS TO CARE FOR DRY SKIN**

Reprinted from "The Journal" March 13, 1995

**By Jay M. Barnett**

Special to The Journal

In cold, dry weather, many people find that their skin becomes very dry and itchy. Understanding relatively simple methods to remedy this condition may result in an improvement in the health of your skin and overall comfort.

When humidity is low in the environment, your skin can lose moisture and develop xerosis, a medical term for dry, flaky skin. When the water loss is more severe, patches of eczema (red, scaly and sometimes cracked skin) may develop and become painful.

What both of these conditions have in common is water loss from the skin. Logically, replacing that water and keeping it there is at the heart of preventing or improving xerosis and eczema. In addition, care must be exercised not to strip the skin of its natural protective layers with harsh soaps and detergents.

Wetting the skin with water is a good start, but a few minutes later, as the water evaporates, it dries the skin even more. The key to "locking in" moisture is applying moisturizer before the skin is dry. In general, the thicker the moisturizer the better, since these compounds act to form a barrier to water loss. You should apply the moisturizer several times per day, especially after washing, before your skin has had a chance to dry completely. For severely dry skin, many dermatologists recommend a procedure called "moist occlusive technique," which is especially suited to very dry hands and feet.

In this technique, one soaks his or her skin in water for 15 minutes, pats dry, and immediately applies the moisturizer. This is followed by wearing dampened white cotton gloves (found in your pharmacy or photo store) over which are placed vinyl or latex gloves that are secured at the wrists. The same technique can be used for the feet, substituting athletic socks and plastic bags for the gloves. While cumbersome, a few nights of using this technique can help you avoid a visit to the doctor.

The soap you use is also important. You should look for soaps with moisturizer and avoid those with deodorants and anti-bacterials. Using bath oils in the bath or applying them at the end of a shower will also help.

Remember, you should try to use a moisturizer as often as possible, and especially after getting your skin wet for any reason. If you wash often, try keeping a tube of moisturizer near the sink or carry one with you.

By selecting the right cleansers and applying moisturizers properly and frequently, your skin can stay soft, healthy and young looking. However, if these steps fail, you may have a more severe skin condition and should see a dermatologist who can prescribe medications to hasten healing.