

Give dry skin a helping hand this winter

Written by Submitted by Robin Kent, RN, PA/C, Primary Care Associates of Leonard
Monday, 24 January 2011 11:51 -

Jan. 20, 2011 - Winter is the time for dry skin. Many people suffer from dry, cracked hands. While dry skin can always be an issue, the winter brings in low humidity, harsh winds, hot showers and frequent (but absolutely necessary) hand washing. Some simple reminders to ease the symptoms include:

1. Moisturize. Then moisturize some more. Repeat. Applying lotion once or twice a day is not enough. Use a lotion or if needed a heavier cream product after every hand washing or hand-punishing chore. The drier your hands the thicker the cream should be. Products with lanolin or paraffin stay on longer. Unscented products are best if you have sensitive skin.

2. Glove up, inside and out.

Never venture out in cold, windy weather without gloves or mittens. Wear lined household gloves to wash dishes. And, if your hands are very sensitive or already dry and cracked, wear gloves over just moisturized hands while you watch TV. Better still, apply a thick layer of lotion or cream, cover with a damp cotton glove followed by a dry glove or plastic bag and leave on for several hours or while you sleep.

3. Wash well, but wisely.

Don't skip hand washing. It is a key defense against colds, flu and other viruses. Most people do not need antibacterial soaps, which are especially drying. Try a moisturizing soap or a non-soap cleanser with warm, not hot water. Hand gels and sanitizers are usually less drying.

4. Seal the cracks, with ointment, bandages or even super glue.

Tiny cracks in the hands or around the nail edges can be very painful. One way to help is to apply some antibiotic ointment and cover with a Band-Aid. If the area is a small crack and tender just apply a small amount of super glue to seal the spot. You may have a little bit of stinging upon applying. Do not apply to infected or large areas.

5. Know when you or your hands need help.

If your hands continue to stay red, irritated or sore despite your best efforts or if you develop signs of an infection such as pus oozing from the cracks or red lines spreading over your skin-get medical attention. You may need a prescription to help those hands.

6. What about the rest of my skin?

Most of the same concepts can be used anywhere on the skin that is dry and chapped.

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Moisturize frequently, especially right after bathing while skin is still moist, avoid drying agents.

Drink more water. We don't get as thirsty in the winter months and hydration is important for healthy skin.