



## Autoimmune Resource and Research Centre

### Information Sheet

## Dry Skin: A burden for all

### Skin: Our natural covering

The skin is our largest organ it is constantly replenishing its surface and needs your help to keep the right moisture levels as we age. Looking after your skin is particularly important for people living with autoimmune illness were dryness can result in discomfort, irritation and inflammation. As we nourish our inner being, we also need to consider nourishment of our outer natural covering.

Dry skin results from a low level of sebum and can make us prone to sensitivity due to its reduced ability to produce and retain moisture. Redness, flaking of skin, itchiness, chapping and cracking are signs of extremely dry, dehydrated skin. What we eat, drink, and do in our skin affects our skin response to retaining moisture or exacerbate dryness symptoms.

The environment we live in presents us with unique conditions, which we need to manage to combat dryness. Our winters can be cold and windy and our summers are sunny, hot and dry. We live and travel in artificial environments cooled and heated by air-conditioning often moving from one extreme temperature to the next. All of these things can increase the drying of our skin, eyes and mouth.

This information sheet offers some advice on how to look after your skin and help combat some of the life elements we are confronted with in our daily life that can exacerbate dryness of the skin.

### Causes

- The skin through its oil glands do not supply enough lubrication to the skin, therefore it becomes dehydrated.
- Dry skin could be due to an autoimmune illness such as Sjogrens, Lupus, Eczema or Scleroderma
- Dry skin could be due to a genetic condition.
- Skin conditions such as dermatitis, eczema, psoriasis, or seborrhoea.
- Dry skin could also be a result of taking medications including diuretics, antispasmodics and antihistamines.
- Skin gets exposed to the elements such as wind, cold and sun. Winter is particularly a problem due to over-heating in our living and workspaces and the heating zapping the moisture in the air.
- Poor diet
- Nutritional deficiencies, especially deficiencies of vitamin A and the B vitamins
- Too much alcohol and caffeine
- Not enough water
- Smoking
- Environmental factors such as exposure to chemicals, cosmetics, soaps and detergents
- Excessive bathing with harsh soaps and cleansers.
- Bathing and showers in hot temperature rather than warm
- No replenishment of skin moisture through use of water, lubricants, moisturisers and oils.

### Tips for Caring for Dry Skin

1. Avoid the use of Hot Water when cleansing your skin. This extends to baths and showers. Warm showers and baths are better for cleansing and preventing dryness for occurring.
2. Use soft cloths as rough surfaced cloths can irritate the skin.
3. Spray face with deionised or mineral water with a few drops of essential oils to freshen face during the day. Chemicals such as chlorine in tap water can irritate and hasten drying of skin surface on the face.

4. Regular stimulation of the skin surface through gentle rubbing or massage can help to invigorate the skin. Use a good quality moisturiser or some essential oils or Aloe Vera to help rehydrate the skin surface. **Avoid Baby Oil** as it is a petroleum-based product. Olive oil from your kitchen can be used if you don't have access to essential oil products.

### *Good Oils for Dry Skin*

*Almond, Apricot, Avocado Chamomile, Evening Primrose, Geranium  
Lavender. Olive. Patchouli. Rose. Sandalwood. Ylana-Ylana*

5. Most soaps have a drying effect on the skin, this includes bath and shower gels. Their use not only removes dirt but also the natural oils protecting the skin. If you need to use a soap try one that has a neutral pH or a moisturiser within them. A non-perfumed sorbolene cream with warm water can also be used as a soap substitute it removes dirt and moisturises at the same time.
6. Remember to pat the skin dry after a bath or showers.
7. Moisturise often but particularly after bathing, shaving or washing your hands. Moisturisers increase the water content of the skin's outer layers and provide a protective barrier to wind and sun. If possible apply moisturisers in a double action: after bathing or shaving, pat the skin dry moisturise, allow this to be absorbed and then apply a 2<sup>nd</sup> layer.
8. Wear a sunscreen lotion daily even in winter. This protects you from harmful UV radiation in the sunlight, whilst driving and from store and office lighting. It also helps prevent moisture loss.
9. Try to use non detergent based, neutral-pH products to cleanse your skin and when shampooing your hair.
10. For cracked, dry skin on the fingers, use calendula cream or oil with comfrey, vitamin E oil, and Aloe Vera.
11. Moisturising at night can have special benefits. Hands and feet can have a thicker more intensive moisturiser applied before going to sleep. Try applying the moisturiser as a final preparation before going to sleep. To increase the moisturising effect apply thickly and wear some cotton gloves and or socks.
12. You can also increase the absorption of lotions and creams on the hand by applying the cream then wearing cotton gloves then plastic gloves and placing the hands in warm water.
13. Keep any chapped areas protected from the elements, wear gloves, socks and shoes.
14. Stay out of the wind and sun. The wind and sun is responsible for most of the damage done to the skin. It causes dryness, wrinkles, irritated and burning sensations.
15. **Do not smoke.** Nicotine contained within cigarettes will deprive the skin of oxygen and essential nutrients by constricting the blood vessels, including the tiny capillaries that serve the skin. Smoking also dries the skin and can make it appear dull, dry and leathery.

### ***Herbs and Natural remedies for dryness***

- *Aloe Vera can soothe, heal and moisturise.*
- *Lavender oil mixed into your bath water, into a misting bottle or into some sorbolene cream can help moisture and soothe irritated skin.*
- *Oatmeal can be used as a gentle cleanser in the bath or shower. Just place a handful of rolled oats into an old stocking, tie a knot at the end and use with warm water. Throw the sock away after use.*
- *Be like Cleopatra and have a milk bath, in a warm bath mix in 150gm of powdered milk and a tablespoon of olive or almond oil. The milk has a great calming and soothing effect providing a skin tonic.*
- *Calendula flowers can be simmered in a brew and filtered into some olive oil to make a moisturiser to soothe and soften the skin.*

## The air we breathe

Sometimes we live and work in a dry environment, this can exacerbate dryness symptoms of the skin but also dryness of the eyes mouth and airways. Many people report that dryness can be worse at night or in the early morning. This may be alleviated by changing the humidity within your sleeping space.

1. Use a humidifier to put some moisture in your environment, especially in winter. This helps to reduce the amount of moisture lost from the skin through evaporation. The use of a humidifier can also help with dry airways. Commercial humidifier can be purchased from chemists and good electrical shops, the majority have safety shut off to prevent them running dry. This allows safer use overnight.
2. Moisture can also be placed back into a room with a heater by placing an open dish of water near or in front of your heater. The water will need to be topped up overtime. You can also place a few drops of scented oil in the water to leave an air freshened smell in the room.
3. Try to avoid sudden temperature changes indoors and keep your home warm rather than overheated. In Australia, the recommendation for a comfortable room should range from 22°C to 24°C in winter and between 21°C and 22°C in summer.
4. Your skin is fragile and needs extra care as we age and if we have an autoimmune illness. Use good quality moisturisers even when you are indoors to form a barrier of protection.
5. Drink plenty of water, at least 2 litres a day.

## What about eating and drinking?

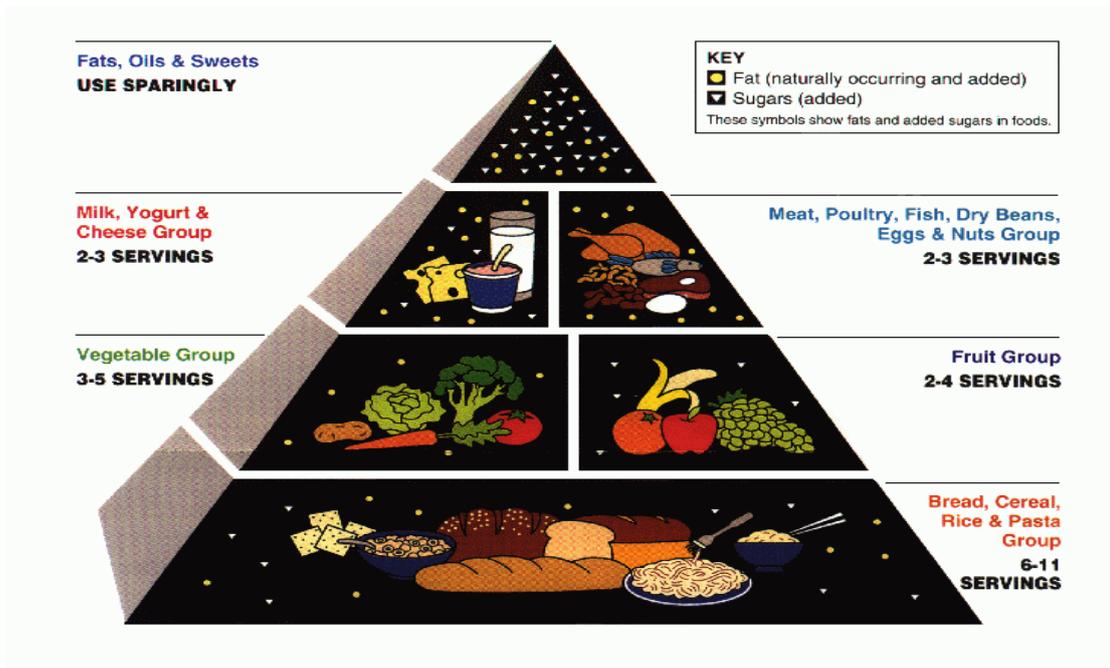
1. Drink plenty of water at least 2 litres daily. **Tea and Coffee do not count.** Some people report that drinking warm water can a little easier than ice or cold water. Try it with a slice of lemon, a strawberry or a couple of mint leaves. There is also a product called chlorophyll that gives a minty taste to water and does not take away from the rehydrating effects, as do other additives such as cordial, coffee and tea.

Tip: Whenever you go to the toilet, wash your hands then drink a glass of water immediately.

2. A good nutritious diet including vegetables, fruits, grains, seeds, and nuts.
3. Increase your fibre intake through eating more raw foods.
4. Eat protein with every meal including protein from both animal and vegetable sources.
5. Eat fruits and vegetables of red, purple, yellow and orange colour as these are high in antioxidants. Berries are especially good.
6. Vitamin A and C rich foods such as carrots, apricots and rock melon, are good for dry skin. These foods are important nutrition for the skin.
7. The use of cold-pressed oils in the preparation of foods is better than using heat-processed vegetable oils which are associated with the presence of free radical which are destructive to overall health.
8. Limit your intake of caffeine, alcohol, soft drinks, cordials and additional sugar. These substances have a diuretic effect, causing the body and skin cells to dehydrate through the loss of essential fluids and minerals.
9. Limit your intake of junk or 'comfort foods' such as lollies, cakes, chocolate, and potato chips. These foods can increase your weight as well as aid in the dehydration of the body through salt and sugar levels.
10. Try not to eat fried and fat laden foods.

Tip: Evening primrose oil, fish oil and flax seed oil supplements are beneficial for overall health and for the support of skin nutrition and health.

Keep your diet simple and balanced. Follow the good food triangle.



### The final word

1. Try to exercise regularly as exercise encourages blood flow and circulation nourishing the skin from within.
2. Get the correct amount of rest as the skin's repairs itself and renews its layers best during our resting phases or while we sleep.
3. Have a healthy and positive attitude to managing what you eat, drink, and do in your skin.

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ARRC provides education, support and research services for people living with a range of systemic and organ-specific autoimmune diseases. For more information, education and support contact ARRC

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#### ARRC information for patients, carers & Health Professionals

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