



Maintaining Healthy Skin As We Age

Information for Patients, Residents and Carers

What does the skin do?

Healthy skin is important for everyone:

- It protects all the other organs in the body
- It helps the body control temperature through insulation and sweating
- It is full of nerve endings that help feel touch, pain, heat and cold
- Intact skin stops germs. If the skin is dry or broken it is easier for germs to get in
- It protects us from the sun's rays, especially ultraviolet light that can damage cells
- Our skin produces vitamin D when it is exposed to the sun. This is important for healthy bones
- It prevents water loss and removes water and waste material through sweating.

Do you know that as we get older our skin changes?

- Our skin gets thinner and becomes fragile
- It wrinkles and sags
- It develops age spots and skin tags

- It can become dry, rough and itchy as sweat and oil glands reduce
- It bruises more easily
- All of this means the skin is less able to protect the body and there is an increased risk of injury.

Problems that can occur:

- Dry skin is one of the most common complaints of older people. This may be itchy and appear as dry, flaky or scaly skin which may crack or split. Germs can then get in and cause infection
- Excess moisture, from incontinence of urine or faeces for example, can weaken the skin making it easier to damage
- People that can't walk or move very well, have a history of falls, or need help with their activities of daily living are at risk of developing skin injuries
- People who are overweight or underweight can have more problems with skin breakdown and they are more at risk of preventable skin injuries
- People who have swollen lower legs or ankles are at risk of skin tears.

Regular skin assessment is important

Check your skin daily for any new skin changes such as:

- Wounds
- Rashes
- Bruising
- Any change in colour e.g. red, white, blue
- Burning, itch or discomfort.

Tips on caring for your skin

- ✓ Eat a balanced diet including two servings of fruit and five servings of vegetables each day
- ✓ Drink 6-8 glasses of water a day
- ✓ Change position frequently to prevent pressure damage
- ✓ Use a skin cleanser that is soap free, pH balanced and non-perfumed
- ✓ Pat skin dry. Do not rub and protect skin that is exposed to friction
- ✓ Moisturise your skin twice daily using a moisturiser suitable for your skin
- ✓ Use absorbent, disposable incontinence products if needed
- ✓ Keep fingernails and toenails trimmed and short

It is estimated that 70% of older adults have skin problems.

- ✓ Wear long sleeves and pants to protect limbs
- ✓ Wear comfortable, well-fitting clothes and footwear
- ✓ Avoid wearing jewellery with sharp edges
- ✓ If you have problems with balance or falls see your health professional
- ✓ Report any changes in the skin straight away to a nurse or doctor.

What not to do:

- ✗ Avoid using products that irritate the skin. Try unperfumed lotions and avoid talcum powder
- ✗ Avoid using soap. Traditional soaps can dry the skin
- ✗ Do not rub the skin over bony areas as this causes friction
- ✗ Do not use tapes or adhesives.

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