

Dry skin? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Please help! My skin is drying out like you would never believe. It is scaly and itchy at times. Could this be as a result of the weather? Are there any pointers that you could give me so that I don't feel like my face is cracking and looking like garbage? It seems to get worse after I shower. What is this? What can I do?

Signed,
Scales

Answer

Dear Scales,

Not to fear! Dry skin is a common concern resulting from both individual and environmental factors; however, there are a number of preventive measures and treatments you may employ to soothe your skin. Scales, your hunch about the weather is correct — cool climates and dry indoor heat is the perfect recipe for dry skin. The lack of humidity, both inside and outside, leaches the skin of its moisture, leaving it feeling flaky, itchy, and very dry. The cold and dry weather isn't the only culprit — taking long, hot showers or baths may also strip your skin of its natural oils, causing dryness. Also, being over 40 years of age; living in a dry, cold, or low-humidity climate; swimming frequently in chlorinated pools; or having a job that requires a lot of hand-washing can dry out your skin. Taking steps to maintain the moisture in your skin — either by using lotions and oils or covering up exposed skin in the cold — may help relieve some of the discomfort you're feeling.

While there are multiple factors that could be contributing to your dry, scaly skin, there are also multiple solutions! Here are some tips to help prevent your skin from drying out:

- **Use a humidifier in your room** to release some moisture into the air.
- **Apply moisturizer** to your face and body before going outside. Thicker moisturizers may be more effective, as it will hold in moisture and protect your skin from drying out. If you're acne-prone or have sensitive skin, you may talk with a dermatologist to help you find a gentler product. You may also want to try ointments that contain petroleum jelly; however,

these may leave you feeling greasy so it might be a good idea to use them only at night.

- **Use lip balm/moisturizer** to protect your lips. Applying one that contains petroleum or mineral oil at night may help you avoid waking up to flaky lips.
- **Limit shower time and use warm water** to retain your skin's natural oils, which help hold in moisture. If daily showers are on the docket, use warm water instead of hot water and limit the amount of time you spend in the shower or bath to under 15 minutes.
- **Use a gentle cleanser and soap.** Try mild soaps that have added oils and fats, but avoid products containing perfumes, scents, or alcohol — these may irritate your skin.
- **Apply moisturizer immediately after bathing.** When you get out of the shower, pat your skin dry instead of rubbing and immediately apply a moisturizing lotion, cream, or oil to help trap water in the skin's surface cells.
- **Bundle up.** In cold weather, cover up any exposed skin with a scarf or gloves to prevent chapped lips and hands.
- **Soften skin before shaving** to minimize the irritating effects that shaving may have on your face and legs. You may consider softening skin by shaving right after bathing or using a shaving cream or gel.

If your skin continues to be dry and there's redness or scaling, it causes discomfort, or if there are open sores from scratching, try talking with your health care provider or dermatologist to have your skin checked out. Individuals with skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis may experience more severe dry skin and may also need prescription strength medication. Finding the best treatment for your itchiness can provide relief for your skin. As an added bonus, it also prevents bacteria from entering open sores you might get from scratching, which, in turn, could cause an infection. Here's to scratching the surface of how to treat dry skin!

Alice!

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