



Dry Itchy Skin

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What causes Dry Itchy Skin?

Dry air, long hot baths or showers, frequent bathing and harsh detergents can all contribute to the development of dry itchy skin. Cold winter weather worsens dry skin because the amount of moisture contained in cold air is much less than in warm air. Heating our houses in the winter dries out the air and our skin.

What can I do to make my dry itchy skin better?

There are a number of things that you can do to make your skin better.

- 1) Take fewer baths or showers. Limit your bathing to no more than once daily
- 2) Limit the temperature of the water in which you shower or bath. Hot water dries out the skin more than luke warm water.
- 3) Limit the duration of your bath or shower. Shorter times dry out your skin less than longer times.
- 4) Use mild moisturizing soaps (e.g., Cetaphil soap, Oil of Olay, Dove, Basis).
- 5) When towel drying blot your skin with the towel gently rather than vigorously rubbing your skin with it.
- 6) Apply a general skin moisturizer to your skin after each bath or shower (e.g., Eucerin, Vaseline, Lubriderm, Moisturel). For extra-dry skin try the following preparations: Epilyte, Amlactin or 10-25% urea (e.g., Carmol 20, Ultramide 25). These may burn at first if placed on skin with deeper cracks.
- 7) If you swim during the winter months, rinse off the chlorine with cool to warm water after you get out of the pool and then apply a general skin moisturizer to your skin.
- 8) Avoid wearing itchy clothes (e.g., wool clothing).
- 9) Get a humidifier for you home, or at least your bedroom.
- 10) Try to avoid scratching your itchy skin as this makes it worse.
- 11) If the above measures are not sufficient to get your dry itchy skin under control, you can try over the counter anti-itch creams (e.g., Sarna, hydrocortisone) and (or) over the counter anti-itch pills (e.g., Benadryl).
- 12) For more severe dry skin I sometimes prescribe prescription strength medicated creams and anti-itch pills. As the dry itchy skin improves with these medications, they can be stopped but the above recommendations should continue to be followed to prevent the problem from worsening again.
- 13) If your skin doesn't get better with the above measures you should be reevaluated to determine if you have another condition that is causing your dry itchy skin. Sometimes a skin biopsy is required to determine the cause.

