
Dry Skin (Xerotic Eczema)

What causes eczema or dry skin?

This skin condition is caused by dryness. It is frequently seen on the lower legs but can occur anywhere. Dry heat, soap, chlorine in pools and hot water aggravate this condition. Itching is very common.

What causes the itching and drying of the skin?

Your skin is composed of cells and oil. The oil is a high quality oil containing sphingolipids, ceramides, phospholipids, and other natural chemicals, which has not been replicated by cosmetic or pharmaceutical companies despite years of effort. When you use soap or detergents on your pots and pans, the oils are removed. This also happens with your skin. You are washing this superior oil down the drain and, if you moisturize after bathing, you are using an expensive product which is only a cheap imitation of your own oil. Your oil helps to hold the skin cells together and when the oil is lost, you begin to see signs of drying, itching and even cracking and eczema.

Our skin and leather have a lot in common. If leather gets wet, then dries, it will crack. But, if we oil the leather before it dries, it will not crack. Human skin is similar. Normal skin has the ability, unlike leather which is dead, to make its own oils and new cells. So, most of the time, drying our skin does not cause a problem, because our natural recovery makes up for the drying process.

Eczema is an extreme dry-skin condition. The skin is losing its race to keep up with the production of oils and new cells as they are lost. There are several reasons for this. Atopic eczema, a hereditary problem, is one cause. Age, which reduces the oil producing glands in the skin, is another. The most common reason is simply too much contact with soaps, chemicals, and abrasives.

How can I prevent dry skin?

Once the skin dries, it cracks. Each time the skin gets wet and dry again, it becomes drier than it was before. Dry skin itches. Scratching damages the skin; it loses more moisture, and the process becomes a vicious "scratch-itch" cycle. A rash then occurs which is red, bumpy and itchy or painful. If you continue to use soap and chemicals, the rash can develop blisters and begin to ooze a yellow fluid or even bleed.

Treatment consists of bathing with lukewarm water without soap. I prefer Cetaphil

Gentle Skin Cleanser, Aquanil Cleanser, or Pureblend Cleanser. After bathing, a good emollient cream should be applied while the skin is still damp, such as Eucerin lotion, Eucerin Cream, CeraVe cream, Aveeno moisturizing cream, Bag balm, Crisco Shortening, and Vaseline Petroleum Jelly. A cortisone cream or ointment may also be prescribed. This should be applied sparingly to affected areas two times a day and followed by a generous application of emollient cream. When the rash is under control, usually in two weeks or less, the cortisone cream or ointment may be discontinued but the emollient cream should still be used for at least 1 month after all irritation has cleared.

Avoidance of all irritating chemicals, soaps, abrasives, and solvents (like paint thinner or gasoline) must also be priority for at least a month. Another common cause of itching skin especially in the winter months is the use of fabric softeners in the laundry including dryer sheets, so these should be discontinued as well. Swimming in chlorinated pools and hot tubs is another frequent cause of dry skin eczema.

I suggest taking Vitamin C 3,000 to 5,000 mg daily since the skin's requirements are increased during the repair process.