

Caring for your skin

Our skin is our largest organ and a barrier to germs. It protects and maintains body temperature. It is the protective layer that guards us from the environment and stops our body losing fluids. As we age, skin becomes thinner and may become drier.

How to keep skin healthy

- Drink plenty of water to hydrate your skin, unless you have been advised otherwise by a health professional.
- Eat a well-balanced diet which includes fruit and grains, vegetables, meat and dairy.
- Avoid adding fabric softeners to your laundry as these are strongly perfumed and may irritate your skin.



Keeping your skin clean

- Use pH-neutral, non-perfumed, soap-free body wash
- Avoid bar soaps, as they remove the natural oils from the skin causing dryness
- Have shorter, warm showers rather than hot showers
- Use a soft washcloth or shower puff to cleanse your skin
- Rinse your skin and dry gently with a soft towel after showering. Do not rub
- Dry well between your toes and in skin folds
- Products that are plant based (pawpaw ointment) or animal-based (goat's milk soap) may cause allergies in some people.

Moisturising and barrier protection

- Applying moisturiser and barrier cream or barrier cloth to the skin helps maintain the skin's physical barrier, providing protection from irritants and preventing the skin from drying out. Use a non-perfumed moisturiser right after your shower
- Moisturise areas that get frequent exposure to the sun, such as the face, neck, arms and lower legs
- Use a barrier cream or barrier cloths to protect skin in your groin/buttocks from moisture damage caused by sweat or urine and/or faecal leakage.

Sun protection

- Long-term exposure to the sun increases your risk of skin damage and skin cancers. Some skin cancers can spread to other parts of your body if not treated promptly.

To protect your skin:

- Seek shade when outdoors. Use tree shade or umbrellas. Wear a hat with a broad brim or legionnaire style cap
- Use a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 30+ broad spectrum sunscreen. Water-resistant sunscreens should be used if you are very active or are swimming
- Apply sunscreen 15 minutes before going outdoors and every 2 hours even when cloudy
- Wear wrap-around sunglasses with an Eye Protection Factor (EPF) of 10
- Wear wet-suits and rash shirts with an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) of 40+ to increase sun protection
- Avoid or minimise your time in the sun between 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. as the ultraviolet (UV) light is strongest during this time.

Caring for your skin

Check your skin regularly

Any new, changed or bleeding moles, discoloured skin or wounds that won't heal. Ask a family member or your GP to check areas you cannot see, such as your back.

See your GP or Skin Specialist if you notice any changes or are worried or you have fair skin, lots of moles, freckles, sunburn easily or have had skin cancers.

Non-melanoma skin cancers



Basal cell carcinoma (BCC)



Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)

Melanoma



Melanoma

Photos used with permission Professor Peter Soyer

Looking out for skin tears

As we age, skin is damaged more easily. Some medications can also make the skin thinner, such as long-term steroids. Skin tears can happen by bumping into furniture falling, or someone gripping your arm or hand.

You can reduce skin tears by:

- using soap free, pH neutral cleanser and moisturiser
- wearing long sleeves and long pants
- keeping your home clutter-free and using a night light when mobilising at night
- padding sharp edges of furniture
- carers avoiding long fingernails and jewellery
- wearing prescribed glasses.

Pressure Injuries

Pressure Injuries are caused by lying or sitting in the same position for too long. The skin may appear red or purple, or blistered or broken. You are at risk of getting pressure injuries if you are older, can't move well, have poor bladder or bowel control, or have recently been in hospital or unwell. Avoid pressure injuries by checking your skin regularly, change your position frequently and keep your skin clean and dry.

Take home points for healthy skin

- Check your skin often for changes
- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of water, unless advised otherwise by a health professional
- Use a non-perfumed soap free, pH neutral cleanser and moisturiser
- If outdoors, wear sunscreen, wrap-around sunglasses, a broad brim hat and long sleeves
- Talk to a Nurse, GP or Occupational Therapist if you have any concerns.

Where can I find more information?

Cancer Council Australia: [Understanding Skin Cancer](#) and [Eatforhealth.gov: Australian Dietary Guidelines](#)