

Skin Care and Protection for Older Adults

Why is skin care and protection important?

Your skin changes as you age. It becomes thinner and dryer and you lose the normal, protective fat layer under the skin. Your skin is injured more easily and heals more slowly. In addition to these natural changes, exposure to UV rays from sunlight (and tanning beds) and smoking can cause skin damage throughout your life.

What is the best way to care for dry, itchy skin?

Dry skin, which can cause itching, is very common as you get older. Your skin has fewer sweat and oil glands than when you were younger. Frequent baths and showers, especially with harsh soaps, can make your skin even drier. Your skin may be irritated by some cosmetics or fabrics. Medicines may cause dryness or itchiness.

Whatever the cause of dry skin, there are things you can do about it.

- Take fewer showers or baths. Bathing just 2 or 3 times a week may be enough, depending on your activities. Keep your baths and showers short, and use warm, not hot, water.
- Use soaps made for dry skin, such as glycerin soap with cleansing cream, and rinse well.
- Put a skin moisturizer on all of your body right after you pat yourself dry with a towel. Using a moisturizer right after a shower helps keep moisture in your skin. Put more moisturizer on dry areas throughout the day. Avoid perfumed lotions because the perfume may irritate dry skin.
- Wear cotton next to your skin. Wool can irritate dry skin and make itching worse.
- Always shower and use lotion right away after you swim in a chlorinated pool or sit in a hot tub.
- Avoid saunas.
- Consider using a humidifier on cold, dry winter days.
- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day.
- If medicines are causing a dry skin problem, ask your healthcare if there are different medicines you might use.

How does the sun damage skin and how can I protect my skin?

Skin changes as you get older happen partly because of ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun. Your body needs some exposure to sunshine to make vitamin D, but too much exposure can burn and damage your skin and cause skin cancer.

Fair skin burns more easily than tanned or darker skin, but dark skin will burn, too. The closer you are to the sun (for example, living near the equator or at high

altitudes), the more you will be exposed to UVR. Damaged skin can repair itself to some extent if you try to avoid more UVR exposure.

The symptoms of sun damage are:

- Dark "age spots," or new moles
- Dry, rough skin or wrinkling
- Small blood vessels under the cheeks, nose, and ears that break, causing bruises or red spots or lines on the skin

You are most at risk of sun damage to your skin if you:

- Have fair skin that freckles and burns easily
- Live near the equator or at a high altitude
- Spend a lot of time working or playing outdoors
- Sunbathe or visit tanning salons

Here are some ways to protect your skin from sun damage.

- Try to stay out of the sun between 10 AM and 2 PM. Avoid getting a lot of sun and UV exposure, including tanning salons.
- When you are out in the sun, keep your skin covered with clothing. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, and use a sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 15 on uncovered skin.

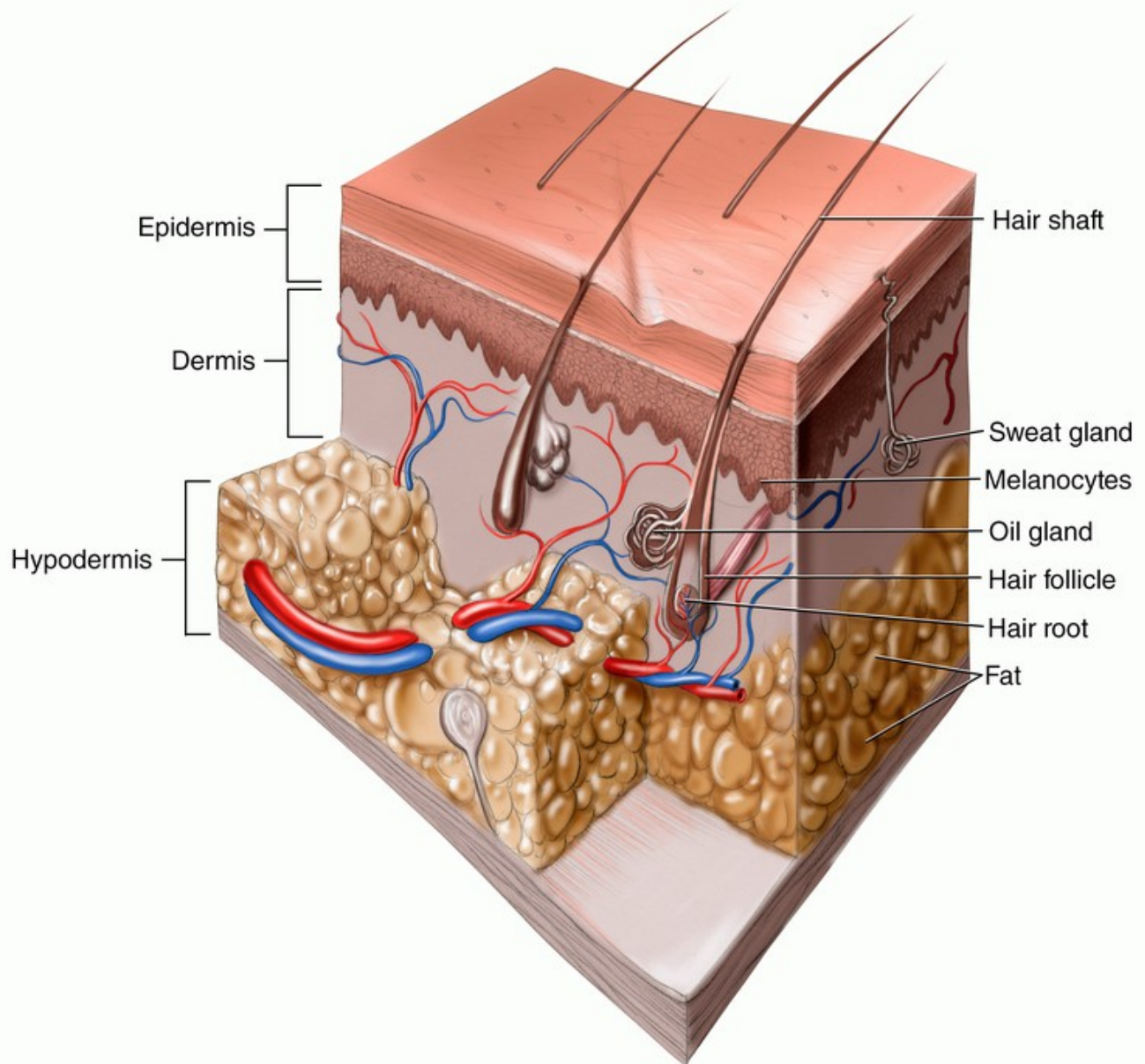
Are there other things I can do to care for and protect my skin?

- Keep your body healthy with good nutrition and enough exercise and rest.
- If you smoke, try to quit. Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to quit smoking.
- Check your skin regularly for new moles or moles that grow or change color. See your healthcare provider if you notice new or unusual changes in your skin.

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Skin: Cross Section



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