

Taking Care of Dry Skin Caused by Frequent Hand Washing

Caring for Dry Hands from Frequent Washing

Washing or sanitizing your hands frequently is always a good practice, but even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is one of the best ways to prevent contracting or spreading disease, but it can leave you with dry skin. Dry skin can cause rough, sand-paper-like skin and rashes due to inflammation.

When the natural oils in the skin are washed away along with dirt and bacteria, skin becomes dry. The more you wash your hands, the drier they can become. Here are some tips on how to keep your hands from getting too dry.



Washing and Moisturizing

Try to follow hand washing with application of a moisturizer. When you wash your hands, leave a little bit of water on your skin. The water can then be sealed in when you apply hand cream. “Patients should use unscented moisturizers because these products are less irritating to skin,” said Mark Boguniewicz, MD, allergist and immunologist at National Jewish Health. Dr. Boguniewicz also recommends using oil-based moisturizing creams because they help restore your skin’s natural oil content. Water-based products evaporate off the skin and may leave your hands feeling more dry. Use hand cream such as Eucerin Crème, Vanicream, Cetaphil Cream, or Aquaphor Ointment instead of body lotion. Hand cream is typically thicker and longer lasting than lotions.

Severe Dry Hands

In more severe cases, dry skin can crack, leaving you with open sores. Cracked skin allows bacteria and germs, such as the COVID-19 virus, to enter the body. To help heal cracked skin, apply thick, unscented creams or petroleum jelly to your hands and cover them with gloves at bedtime. This keeps the product on your skin longer to give your skin time to absorb the moisture and heal.

If you have eczema, excessive dryness can trigger redness and inflammation. If you develop severe dry skin symptoms, you may need to increase skin care efforts or contact your health care provider.

Other Reasons for Dry Hands

“Cleansers and disinfectants can be drying and irritating to skin, especially for people with eczema,” Dr. Boguniewicz said. To protect your skin, wear disposable gloves when using cleaning and disinfecting products.

The type of soap you use also may contribute to dry skin. Avoid using soap meant for dishwashing or hard cleaning on your hands. Use soap that is designated for hand or body washing and, when possible, use unscented soap.

Washing your hands frequently may result in dry skin, but applying cream just as frequently will help maintain clean and moisturized hands.

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