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DRY OR ITCHY SKIN? TOP TIPS TO HELP

Dry or itchy skin can be common as you get older and can make you feel quite miserable. It can increase the risk of having a skin tear, make you feel anxious and can even keep you up at night. The good news is that there are some simple things you can do each day to treat dry or itchy skin.

This brochure gives you tips on how to manage dry or itchy skin and which treatments might help. It also covers other steps you can take to help keep your skin healthy as you get older.

✔ Moisturise, Moisturise, Moisturise

Moisturising regularly is one of the best treatments for dry or itchy skin. As older skin can be thinner, it also helps prevent skin tears. In fact, Australian research has found that men and women who apply an appropriate moisturiser twice a day halve their chance of having a skin tear.

1. Carville K, Leslie G, Osseiran-Moisson R, Newall N, Lewin G. International Wound Journal. 2014; 11: 446-453.

Which moisturiser?

There are many different types of moisturisers and some are more

suitable than others. Ask your GP or pharmacist about which moisturiser might suit you best.

Moisturisers such as QV skin lotion[®], Alpha Keri Lotion[®] are available to DVA gold card and some white and orange card holders through the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS). Talk to your GP about the best treatment for you. There might be other types of creams or medicines your GP can prescribe for dry or itchy skin.

What can I do to treat dry or itchy skin?

- Apply moisturiser liberally morning and night. Make it part of your day by moisturising at the same time each day e.g. after showering in the morning and at bedtime at night.
- Keep your shower or bath as short as possible and use warm rather than hot water.
- Refrigerate your moisturiser for extra cooling effects.
- Use a soap substitute cleanser when bathing. Soap can dry out and damage your skin. Ask your GP if you are eligible for a prescription of a soap substitute cleanser such as e.g. QV® Range, Alpha Keri®, Hamilton®.

- Take care when using a product that may make surfaces more slippery. Dry your hands after using a moisturiser and be careful of getting it on the soles of your feet as it might make them slippery.
- Make these practices part of your daily routine even once your skin no longer feels itchy to prevent it from reoccurring.



✔ Be aware of possible triggers that dry out your skin

Dry itchy skin can be made worse by certain triggers such as soaps, perfumes, cosmetics, detergents, certain clothing, stress and infection. Think about which products you have recently changed and try avoiding them.

✔ Take steps to prevent skin tears

As you get older, it can become more common to get a skin tear. A skin tear is where the outer layer of skin peels back and looks like a flap. It can happen from simply knocking your arm on a chair, or catching your arm on a plant while out gardening. The best prevention is to moisturise twice a day. However, if you do get a skin tear see your GP. Your GP or a nurse can check the wound is clean and give you advice on how to look after it and how to safely remove the dressing.

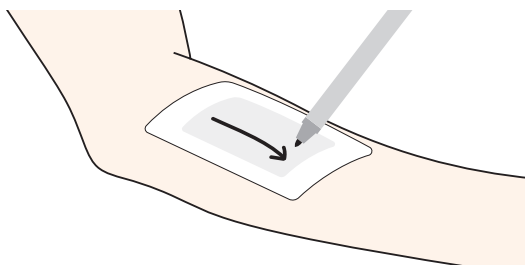


Figure 1: Dressing your skin tear

Cover the wound with a non-stick dressing pad. Draw an arrow on the top of the dressing to indicate the direction for removing. The arrow should be pointing in the same direction as the intact edge of the skin flap.

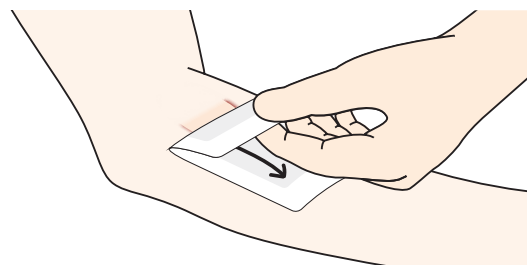


Figure 2: Safe removal of the dressing

Remove the dressing slowly and close to the skin, using the arrow to guide you. **Never pull against the direction of the skin flap.**

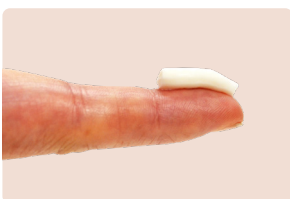
? What about if I have been prescribed a corticosteroid cream?

If your skin becomes inflamed your doctor might also prescribe a corticosteroid product (a cortisone cream, lotion or ointment) for short periods, e.g. 2 to 4 weeks, when the skin becomes inflamed. If your skin is not improving after this time return to your GP who will reassess your treatment.

Be aware that corticosteroid creams are NOT moisturisers. Keep using your moisturiser twice a day to get the best result from your treatment.

How much corticosteroid cream should I use?

You'll get the most benefit from a corticosteroid medicine by using the correct amount. The best way to measure the correct amount is the fingertip unit. That's the amount of cream or ointment squeezed from a tube to cover the tip of your index finger to its first crease.



The number of fingertip units required will depend on the size of the area being treated (see Figure 3). Make sure you spread the cream or ointment as advised by your doctor or pharmacist.

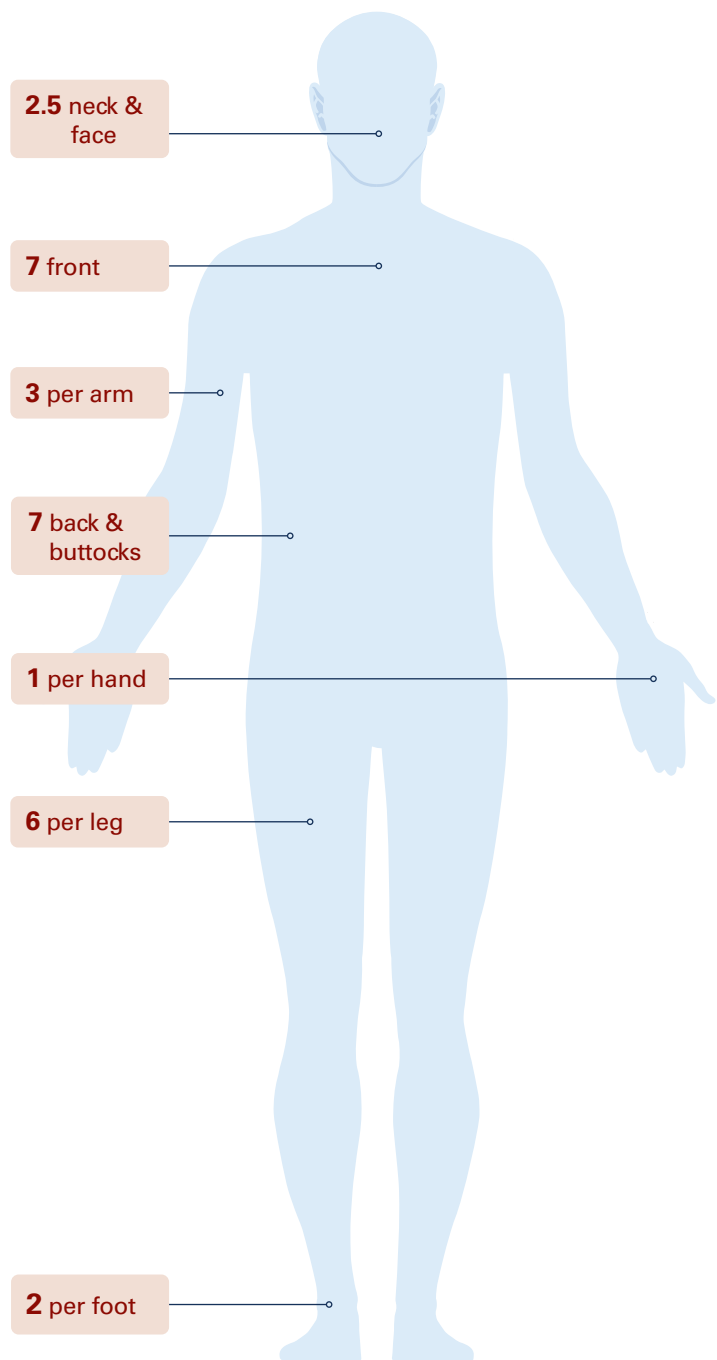


Figure 3: Fingertip units for different areas of the body
Number of fingertip units required to completely cover different areas of the body. Reduce as appropriate to cover smaller area of dermatitis.

✔ Protect your skin from the sun

In Australia, skin cancer accounts for about 80% of all newly diagnosed cancers which is one of the highest rates in the world. Take steps to protect your skin and talk to your GP about having an annual skin check.

What do I need to know about sun protection?

- Where the UV rating is above 3 wear sun protective clothing (e.g. broad-brimmed hat, long sleeves, and trousers). Download the free SunSmart Global UV app on your phone to find out the UV level in your location.
- Put on SPF50 sunscreen, ideally 20 minutes before going outside. If you are eligible, your GP can prescribe high SPF sunscreen of 50+ available through the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS).



- Wear sunglasses that meet Australian standards with a UV rating of two or higher.
- Talk to your GP if you notice any skin changes or if you have any spots that don't heal.

What else can I do to keep my skin healthy?

- Eat a balanced diet, which includes fruit and vegetables, daily and keep adequately hydrated.
- Keep moving – exercise improves blood flow and can help improve balance which reduces the risk of falling which can cause damage to your skin.
- Maintain a healthy weight – being either overweight or underweight can increase your risk of skin problems.
- Do not smoke. For help with quitting smoking, talk to your GP or visit www.quit.org.au
- Some medicines can cause dry itchy skin or impair wound healing. Talk to your GP if you are having ongoing trouble with dry itchy skin or a wound that isn't healing easily.