

# It's Healthy Skin Month!

What you know about your skin?

Your skin protects you from the rest of the world — by size, it's actually your largest organ.

Your skin performs a number of vital functions. To start, it holds in body fluids, which prevents dehydration. It also blocks a large number of harmful microbes, keeping them out of your body. In addition, your skin is full of nerves that help you sense the world around you.

According to the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), "Since your skin plays such an important role in protecting your body, you should keep it as healthy as you can. This will help you keep from getting sick or having damage to your bones, muscles, and internal organs."

So, how can you keep your skin healthy?

Start by cleaning it regularly. Washing your skin is especially important for good health.



As a bonus, keeping the skin of your hands clean will help stop the spread of germs. As you clean your skin, use warm water rather than hot water. This will help you avoid burns, and it keeps your skin moisturized as well. Moisturizing your skin will also boost its health — use a gentle moisturizer that softens your skin without irritating it. Drinking enough water will help you keep your skin hydrated too.

You can also keep your skin healthy by wearing sunscreen. You see, some sun exposure is good for your skin. It prompts your body to make vitamin D, which is a nutrient of concern in the American diet (most people don't get enough of it). However, too much sun can damage your skin, increasing your risk of cancer and reducing your body's ability to fight off infections. To avoid this, follow the NIAMS's advice and "Whenever you're outside, use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or 45."

Tanning beds are not viable alternatives to sun exposure. In a tanning bed, you still get too much UV exposure and you raise your risk of skin cancer to boot. Skip the tanning bed — your skin will thank you.

A final way to keep your skin healthy is to get active! Physical activity increases blood flow to the surface of your skin, helps your body distribute oxygen and nutrients, and (if you break a sweat) flushes your skin of impurities. Be sure to drink enough water after you exercise and reapply sunscreen if you sweat a lot and are exercising outside.

*By Judy Doherty, PC II*

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