

# THE DERMATOLOGY CENTER

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CYRIL SEVERNS, MD  
P. CRAIG STITES, MD

1500 DODSON AVE, STE 270  
FORT SMITH, AR 72901

TEL: 479-709-7340  
FAX: 479-709-7484

## DRY SKIN (XEROSIS)

### General Considerations

Dry skin is due to a number of factors that decrease the moisture content in the skin. Over bathing, changes in environmental humidity, and intrinsic skin changes associated with aging are the most common of these factors.

*Dry skin itches!!* Scratching is a natural response to itching, but should be eliminated if possible. Scratching can cause breaks in the skin that provide avenues for infection. Scratching also causes nerve fibers in the skin to release factors that promote skin thickening and further itching. If you are experiencing severe itching, substitute ice or cool compresses (bags of frozen peas) for your fingernails. You will be more comfortable in the long run.

### Basic Skin Care

#### *Bathing*

Contact with water washes away the natural oils in the skin that serve to moisturize, soften, and protect. Limit the number and duration (5-7 minutes) of baths or showers. Cool to lukewarm water temperature is desirable to minimize the drying effects of bathing. **No hot showers/baths!** After getting out of the water, "pat" dry (*Do not rub*). This is a good time to apply moisturizers while the skin is moist.

#### *Soaps/Cleansers*

Avoid harsh soaps (Ivory) or soaps which contain additives such as deodorants (Safeguard, Zest, Lever 2000, Irish Spring), perfumes (Bath and Body Works), or lanolin (Palmolive). Gentle, bland soaps (**Cetaphil, Unscented Dove, Aveeno, Oilatum, Oil of Olay, Aquanil**) are the best.

Bath oils are occasionally helpful, but avoid heavily perfumed types. Keri oil and Aveeno oatmeal are soothing.

#### *Skin Lubrication*

One of the most important aspects of skin care in patients with dry skin centers around the need to keep the skin well moisturized at all times. Creams and ointments are the most hydrating (moisturizing) with lotions being less so. We recommend the use of **Cetaphil, Aveeno, Moisturel, Eucerin, DML Forte, Vanicream, Aquaphor, Crisco, or Vaseline** (petroleum jelly). You should apply these emollients as frequently (3-4x daily) and liberally as possible.

#### *Laundry Detergents*

It is best to use a perfume and dye free detergent (**Tide Free, Cheer Free, All Free, or Dreft**). Avoid dryer sheets (Bounce) instead use "pour-in" fabric softeners and rinse the clothes twice.

#### *Prescription Creams/Ointments*

These medicines are best applied to moist skin especially right after bathing. Apply thinly to affected areas as directed by your physician. In general these are used for flares (skin is red and itchy) and are discontinued with improvement (7-10 days). Also, the soak and smear technique can be used in severe cases.