

Cracking the Dry Skin Dilemma!

One would think with all the rain in Vancouver that dry skin wouldn't be a problem. But that isn't the case. Dry skin can result from extended exposure to the elements, from contact with chemicals and harsh soaps, and when your body's defense mechanisms are overburdened by heavy waste elimination through your detoxification organs—your liver, kidneys, bowels, and skin. Underlying health issues—such as an underactive thyroid, complications of diabetes, and certain medications including diuretics, antispasmodics, antihistamines, and HIV medications—can also dehydrate your skin.

Rough, cracked, and dry skin can be caused by the depletion of natural oils in the body or a lack of moisture on the skin, leading to discoloration and premature aging. Signs of dehydration include scaling, flaking skin that feels tight after washing, has a tendency to chap and crack, and is generally lacklustre.

Hydrating your body encourages skin cells that are plump and full of fluid. There are a number of holistic strategies to help your skin achieve a youthful, healthy appearance. Some key nutrients for the skin include Vitamin A and beta-carotene, which both strengthen and protect the skin. Vitamin B is known as the anti-stress agent and also assists liver function. Vitamin E protects against harmful free radicals that damage skin cells and speeds up the healing process. And omega 3-6-9—essential fatty acids found in fish, flax oil, and nuts—provide needed oil and moisture to the skin from the inside out.

There are also several herbs, known as blood cleansers, which can help your skin by improving the function of the liver and kidneys, thereby alleviating some of the skin's detoxification responsibilities. They can improve the texture of the skin and minimize dryness and scaly patches. These herbs include dandelion root and leaf (*Taraxacum officinalis*), blue flag (*Iris versicolor*), cleavers (*Galium aparine*), and nettle leaves (*Urtica dioica*). You can take them internally in tea or in tincture form.

Here are some nutritional suggestions to maintain healthy skin:

- Add flaxseed oil to salads, baked potatoes, or pasta.
- Increase your raw food intake, particularly orange and yellow vegetables, which are high in beta-carotene: carrots, tomatoes, squash, peppers, cantaloupes, and apricots.
- Eat unsalted and unroasted nuts: almonds, pecans, brazil nuts, and pumpkin seeds.
- Eat wild salmon, which is an excellent source of essential fatty acids; it hydrates the skin from the inside out, assists in repairing tissues, and has healing, anti-aging properties.
- Avoid fried foods, animal fat, hydrogenated oil, sugar, potato chips, and chocolate.
- Drink six to eight glasses of water daily, and avoid caffeine and alcohol, which are diuretics that cause the body to lose fluids.

Some topical applications for treating dry skin:

- Apply aloe vera gel to dry, chapped skin.
- Steam your face using two tsp of dried chamomile and lavender flowers per four cups boiling water. Cover your head with a towel and steam your face for two to three minutes. Afterward, apply a cold, wet facecloth to your face to close the pores.
- Create a face mask using half an avocado (or a ripe banana) mashed and mixed with lemon juice; apply for 10 to 15 minutes and rinse well. Your skin will be supple, soft, and well nourished.
- Brush your skin before bathing using a dry natural vegetable bristle brush on your torso, legs, and arms. Working up from your extremities, move the brush in a circular motion towards your heart. It's an excellent way to slough off dead skin, improve blood flow, rid your body of waste matter, and encourage lymphatic drainage and detoxification. It's ideal for cleansing, improving your skin texture and promoting glowing, healthy skin.

Finally, avoid too much sun. Proteins in the skin such as elastin, collagen, and keratin, which contribute to skin elasticity, are damaged through constant exposure to the sun. Lastly, don't smoke! Smoking constricts blood vessels and tiny capillaries that carry nutrients to the skin, leading to a dry leathery texture. And who would want that?

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