

Skin care and you



Why is it important?

Skin is the largest organ in your body. Your skin acts like armour to protect your body and it is important that you care for it to keep this defence intact.

If your skin is very dry, you are much more likely to develop skin tears and other types of wounds. Germs collect under dry, flaky skin, so tiny breaks easily become infected.

As you become older your skin also becomes more fragile and is more easily damaged. It also takes longer for bumps, cuts and scrapes to heal. Caring for your skin correctly will significantly reduce these risks.

What can I do?

Examine your skin every day as you get out of bed

- Look for any damage or changes to your skin like swelling, redness, itchiness or dryness
- Pay special attention to any skin folds or bony areas and if you cannot see parts of your body, use a mirror or ask someone to help you



Keep your skin clean and dry

- How often you need to wash or shower depends on many things. Your legs may need to be washed more often than the rest of your body. Discuss your needs with your health professional
- Use warm water and a soap alternative when washing or showering. Ordinary soaps will dry your skin
- Soap alternatives can be found in your chemist. You should look for products that are perfume free, pH balanced or neutral with a pH value of 7 or less
- Gently pat your skin dry, rather than using firm rubbing
- Remember to dry between your toes
- If you have trouble with continence ('wetting' or 'soiling' your underwear), ask your health professional for advice about preventing skin breakdown in that area
- Incontinence that leads to excoriation or skin problems that don't go away are best assessed by a specialist continence nurse for the most appropriate management plan

Moisturise your skin every day

- Use an unscented moisturiser
- Avoid applying the moisturiser between your toes as too much moisture can lead to fungal infections
- Depending on the level of dryness, some people will be suited to thinner lotions, and others will require thicker creams or even ointments for very dry skin. Your health professional will be able to advise you about the best product for your skin
- Apply the moisturiser in the same direction as your body hair and gently smooth into your skin. Do not rub
- The amount of moisturiser you use should leave a sheen on your body, but not soil your clothes



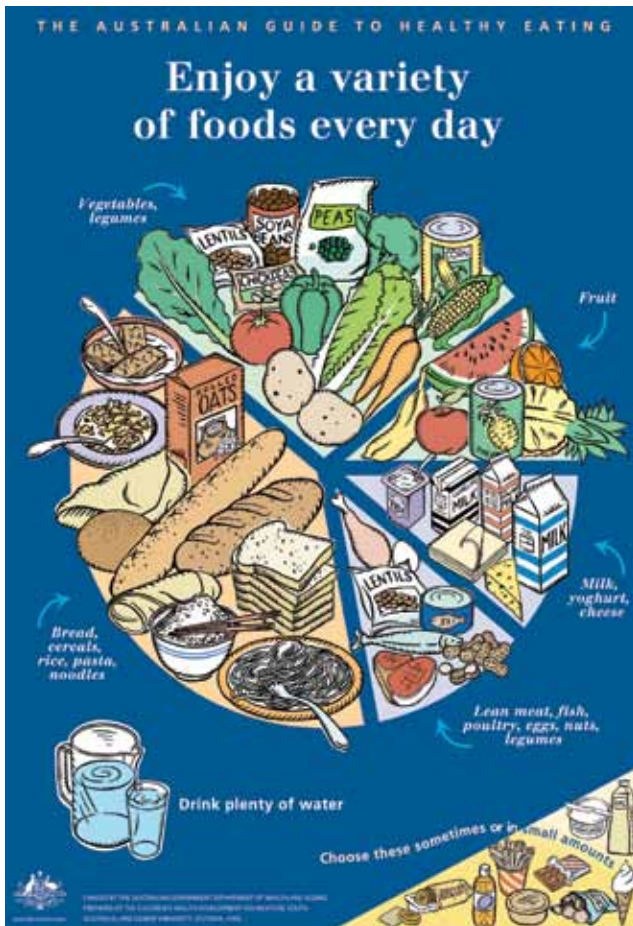
Prevent injuries

- Avoid extremes of hot and cold temperatures. Do not wash with very hot water, and protect your skin from cold air and wind
- Do not sit too close to the heater and avoid using hot water bottles
- Reduce your chance of falling – ensure you wear sturdy and sensible footwear to prevent falls. Your health professional can advise you about this
- Keep your nails short and clean to prevent scratching yourself
- Ask your health professional to assess whether you need any special equipment to assist you with moving around or with preventing falls. For example, walking frames, special cushions, mattresses or slide sheets
- Ensure you have exposure to enough sun, but not too much. Most people need 2–3 hours of sun per week to obtain the benefits of vitamin D. In Victoria, May to August is a good time to get outside. From September to April you need only a few minutes a day, wearing sun protection

Keep up your fluids

- It is very important to drink enough fluids to help keep your skin elastic and strong. This decreases your chance of damaging your skin. Try to drink eight glasses of fluid a day **unless you have been advised otherwise by your doctor**
- Fluids include water, milk, juice or flavoured water. Contrary to popular belief, tea and coffee can be useful for maintaining hydration. Tea and coffee drinkers do not suffer dehydration from the caffeine in these drinks





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Look after other areas of yourself that affect the health of your skin

- Ensure you eat a varied and healthy diet. Ask your nurse to give you the 'Healthy eating for healing' health care guide to advise you in this area
- If you have diabetes, ensure your glucose levels are well-maintained
- If you are on multiple medications, ask your doctor to review whether they are all necessary. Some medications can lead to thinning and drying of the skin

Prevention is better than cure, but if you sustain an injury, treat it!

- Have special dressings and equipment on hand to treat any injuries. Your nurse can advise you on the dressings you need to have – seek medical or nursing attention after following these steps, or if you cannot attend to the care by yourself
- If you tear your skin, apply first aid treatment immediately:
 - Wash your hands with soap and water
 - Stop the bleeding by applying pressure using a clean face cloth and elevating the affected area
 - Once the bleeding has stopped, cleanse the area using warm, running water to gently irrigate the wound. Try and remove any dirt or grit with a moist cotton bud
 - If there is a skin flap which has torn back, try to use the moist cotton bud to gently roll it back into place. DO NOT pull the flap tight
 - Place an absorbent dressing with a very gentle adhesive over its entire surface (such as silicone) onto the wound. Do not apply any tapes

Tips to remember

- 1 Inspect your skin daily. Early detection leads to early treatment! If you notice any changes/injuries to your skin, report them to your health professional**
- 2 If you have difficulties following these recommendations, talk to your health professional. They may discuss referral to other health professionals such as allied health, continence advisors and/or programs to prevent falls**

References

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Disclaimer

This health care guide is part of the 'Connected Wound Care' program, which provides important information about wound care. All care has been taken to ensure information is current and best-practice, however always consult your healthcare professional if you have any concerns or queries.

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