HEALTH BASICS

Skin care tips

Skin care means daily habits that clean, moisturize, and protect your skin

WHAT IT IS
Daily habits for cleaning, moisturizing, and protecting skin

WHERE IT COMES UP
Washing, shaving, sun exposure, and choosing personal care products

WHY IT MATTERS
Supports the skin barrier and limits irritation and sun damage

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a disease or diagnosis

WHO TO ASK
A pharmacist, primary care clinician, or dermatologist

HOW IT IS CHECKED
No standard test for a skin care routine

Overview

Skin care is the routine of cleaning and protecting your skin. It may include cleanser, moisturizer, sunscreen, shaving products, and treatments for a specific concern.

Skin care is not a disease or diagnosis. There is no single routine that suits everyone. Your skin's needs can be affected by age, climate, work, allergies, medicines, and conditions such as eczema or acne.

A basic routine does not need many products. For most people, the main goals are gentle cleansing, enough moisture, and protection from ultraviolet, or UV, radiation. UV radiation comes from the sun and can damage skin even when it does not cause sunburn.

Products marketed as "natural," "clean," or "hypoallergenic" are not automatically safer for your skin. Plant extracts, fragrances, preservatives, and other ingredients can still cause irritation or an allergic reaction.

How it works

The outer layer of your skin is called the skin barrier. It helps keep water in and blocks many

irritants, allergens, and germs. Frequent washing, harsh soaps, dry air, friction, and some skin products can weaken this barrier.

Cleansers contain ingredients that lift oil, dirt, sunscreen, and other material from the skin. Strong cleansers and very hot water can also remove too much protective oil. A mild cleanser and lukewarm water are usually less drying.

Moisturizers support the skin barrier in several ways:

Lotions are usually lighter. Creams and ointments are thicker and may work better for very dry areas. The best choice is one that feels comfortable enough for you to use regularly.

Sunscreen reduces the amount of UV radiation reaching your skin. "Broad-spectrum" means the product protects against both UVA and UVB radiation. UVA contributes to skin ageing and skin cancer risk. UVB is a major cause of sunburn and also contributes to skin cancer.

Skin care products can be cosmetics, medicines, or both. A moisturizer used only to soften skin is generally a cosmetic. A product containing an active ingredient to treat acne, for example, may be regulated as a medicine. Follow the label and any instructions given with a prescribed product.

- Humectants draw water into the outer skin
- Emollients fill small gaps between skin cells and make skin feel smoother
- Occlusives form a layer that slows water loss

Why it matters for your health

Comfortable, intact skin is better able to act as a barrier. Gentle care may reduce dryness, cracking, and irritation caused by washing, weather, work, or personal care products.

Sun protection matters because UV damage builds over time. Shade, clothing, hats, and sunscreen can work together. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher for exposed skin. SPF, or sun protection factor, mainly describes protection against sunburn-producing UVB radiation.

Hands may need extra care because washing and alcohol-based hand sanitizers can dry the skin. Hand cleaning remains important for reducing the spread of infections. Applying fragrance-free moisturizer after washing can help if your hands become dry.

A simple routine can also make it easier to notice a problem. If you start several new products at once, it may be difficult to tell which one caused irritation.

What can go wrong

Irritant contact dermatitis happens when something directly damages or inflames the skin. Common triggers include repeated wet work, detergents, solvents, friction, and strong skin products.

Allergic contact dermatitis is an immune reaction to an ingredient. Fragrances, preservatives, hair dyes, adhesives, and some plant ingredients can be triggers. A reaction may appear after you have used a product safely in the past.

Heavy, oily, or irritating products may contribute to acne or folliculitis , which is inflammation around hair follicles. A label saying "non-comedogenic" means a product is designed to be less likely to block pores, but it is not a guarantee.

Exfoliating acids, retinoids, acne treatments, and hair-removal products can cause irritation if they are combined or used too often. Some medicines and skin products can also make skin more sensitive to sunlight. Check the label or ask a pharmacist if you are unsure.

Contaminated products or shared razors and cosmetics may contribute to skin or eye infections. Do not add water to a product unless its instructions say to do so, and do not use products that have changed in smell, colour, or texture.

Arrange routine follow-up with a primary care clinician or dermatologist for a rash, itching, cracking, pain, or breakouts that persist despite stopping a suspected product. Also arrange an assessment for a sore that does not heal, unexplained bleeding, or a mole or mark that is changing.

Seek urgent medical care for rapidly spreading redness with fever, severe pain, swelling around an eye, or extensive blistering or peeling. Skin pain or a rash involving the mouth, eyes, or genitals-especially after starting a medicine-also needs urgent assessment.

Call emergency services for trouble breathing, faintness, or swelling of the tongue or throat after using a product. These can be signs of a severe allergic reaction.

What you can do

Keep your routine focused on what your skin needs rather than the number of products.

"Fragrance-free" is usually more useful than "unscented" for sensitive skin. An unscented product may still contain fragrance ingredients that cover other smells.

There is no blood test or measurement that grades a skin care routine. If allergic contact dermatitis is suspected, a dermatologist may offer patch testing . This is a supervised test in

which small amounts of possible allergens are placed on the skin for several days. It is different from a skin-prick test used for some immediate allergies.

Ask a pharmacist or clinician whether a new product is suitable if you have an existing skin condition, take medicines that increase sun sensitivity, are pregnant, or are using several medicated products. Keep a list or photographs of products if you are trying to identify a reaction.

- Wash with lukewarm water and a gentle cleanser; avoid hard scrubbing
- Apply moisturizer after washing while the skin is still slightly damp
- Choose fragrance-free products if your skin is easily irritated
- Introduce one new product at a time and record any reaction
- Use shade, clothing, and a broad-spectrum, water-resistant SPF 30 or higher sunscreen
- Reapply sunscreen as directed on the label, especially after swimming, sweating, or towel drying
- Avoid picking spots or using shared razors, eye makeup, or lip products
- Follow the directions for acne treatments, exfoliants, and prescribed creams

Common questions

Do I need to wash my face twice a day?

Not everyone does. Washing after sweating and removing sunscreen or makeup before bed are useful. More frequent washing may worsen dryness or irritation. Choose a frequency that keeps your skin clean without leaving it tight, sore, or flaky.

Is expensive skin care better?

Price does not show how well a product will suit your skin. Packaging, fragrance, and marketing can add cost. A basic cleanser, moisturizer, and sunscreen may be enough.

Should oily skin be moisturized?

Oily skin can still become dry or irritated. A light, fragrance-free moisturizer labelled non-comedogenic may feel more comfortable than a heavy ointment.

Can I test a product before using it widely?

You can try a small amount on a limited area as directed by the manufacturer. This may reveal irritation, but it cannot rule out an allergy or guarantee that the product is safe for your face or eyes. Do not test hair dye or other products in a way that conflicts with their instructions.

Does sunscreen replace shade and clothing?

No. Sunscreen is one part of sun protection. Shade, covering clothing, and a broad-brimmed hat can reduce exposure, particularly when the sun is strong.

Sources

- American Academy of Dermatology Association: Skin care tips dermatologists use
- American Academy of Dermatology Association: How to select a sunscreen
- US Food and Drug Administration: Tips to stay safe in the sun-from sunscreen to sunglasses
- US Food and Drug Administration: Is it a cosmetic, a drug, or both?
- NHS: Emollients
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: About hand hygiene in schools and early care and education settings