

Two Common Issues with Aging Skin and Some Simple Solutions to Help

When it comes to an elder person's comfort, caring for his or her skin is as important a daily activity as any other.

Dryness

Dry, flaky skin affects 75% of people over the age of 65, according to Medscape. Lower legs, elbows and forearms tend to be especially susceptible to dryness and itchiness.

Why does dry skin affect older adults so intensely? The loss of sweat and oil glands as a person ages contributes to dry skin.

Simple solutions:

- Take warm rather than hot baths or showers and bathe less often. There are also products available in many drugstores that allow a "dry bath" using a special pre-moistened towel that can be warmed in the microwave or a special shower cap that can clean hair without the use of water.
- Use only mild soaps and shampoos. Some people may require a special soap or shampoo such as Nizoral which is made for special skin conditions.
- Moisturize often, especially after a bath. This will help protect against itchiness. Because an older person's skin is thinner, scratching can lead to broken skin, which invites infection.
- Avoid perfumes, which may irritate the skin.
- Drink plenty of fluids to rehydrate the skin.
- Use a humidifier in the winter or in dry climates.
- Avoid smoking and stress, which can contribute to dry skin.
- Avoid overexposure to the sun and use sunblock.



Bruising

Older adults are more susceptible to bruising, especially on their arms and legs. Even minor bumps and scrapes can lead to extensive bruising.

Why does it affect older adults? As skin ages, it becomes thinner. Additionally, loss of fat and connective tissue weakens the support around blood vessels, making them more susceptible to injury and requiring more time for them to heal.

Simple solutions:

- Apply a cold compress to the bruise for about 20 minutes. This reduces the blood flow to the area, which can reduce the size of the bruise and decrease inflammation.
- Never discontinue any medication without consulting a doctor; however, here are a few medications that can increase the chance of bruising:
 - o Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (ibuprofen, Advil, and Aleve)
 - o Aspirin
 - o Anticoagulants such as coumadin or heparin
 - o Antiplatelet medications
 - o Corticosteroid medications (applied to the skin, taken orally or injected)
 - o And, medications that affect coordination can make one more prone to falls.
- If the bruise takes up a large area of the leg or foot, the leg should be kept elevated as much as possible.
- The Mayo Clinic reports that if a bruise is large and painful or if bruises appear for no reason, especially if new medication is being taken or bleeding in other areas is noticed, such as on the nose and gums, call a physician.
- Get plenty of vitamin C. Vitamin C plays an important role in the production of collagen, which can protect against bruising.
- Wear long sleeves and long pants when doing tasks that may injure the skin.
- Quit smoking. Smoking decreases collagen production, which can lead to easier bruising.

A qualified, specially trained caregiver from CareWorks Health Services understands skin care needs due to aging and can assist with:

- Bathing and moisturizing
- Inspecting for changes
- Avoiding bed sores
- Foot care for diabetics
- Incontinence skin care

Contact CareWorks Health Services today for more information.

Sources: The Mayo Clinic, University of Rochester Medical Center, AgingCare, ParentGiving

