



# Mature Adult Skin Care

Americans spend billions of dollars each year on skin care products that promise to reverse the aging process of the skin - erase wrinkles, lighten age spots, and eliminate itching, flaking, or redness. The simplest and cheapest way to keep your skin healthy and young looking is to take excellent care of it - and the best way to do that is to **stay out of the sun**.

Sunlight is a major cause of the skin changes we think of as aging — changes such as wrinkles, dryness, and age spots. Your skin undergoes normal changes with aging. For example, you sweat less, leading to increased dryness. As your skin ages, it becomes thinner and loses fat, so it looks less plump and smooth. Underlying structures — veins and bones in particular — become more prominent. Your skin takes longer to heal when injured.

THE best thing to prevent or delay aging changes in the skin is by staying out of the sun. Although nothing can completely undo sun damage, the skin sometimes can repair itself if the damage is mild. So, it's never too late to protect yourself from the harmful effects of the sun. See our **Sunscreen Article**.

## Age Related Changes

### Age Spots

Age spots, or “liver spots” as they’re often called, have nothing to do with the liver. Rather, these flat, brown spots are caused by years of sun exposure. They are bigger than freckles and appear in fair-skinned people on sun-exposed areas such as the face, hands, arms, back, and feet. The medical name for them is solar lentigo. They may be accompanied by wrinkling, dryness, thinning of the skin, and rough spots.

A number of treatments are available, including skin-lightening, or “fade” creams; cryotherapy (freezing); and laser therapy. Tretinoin cream is approved for reducing the appearance of darkened spots. A sunscreen or sun block should be used to prevent further damage.

### Easy Bruising

As people age they often begin to notice an increased number of bruises, especially on their arms and legs. The skin becomes thinner with age and sun damage. Loss of fat and connective tissue weakens the support around blood vessels, making them more susceptible to injury. Sometimes even the blood vessel walls become more easily damaged (capillary fragility). The skin bruises and tears more easily and takes longer to heal.

Sometimes bruising is caused by medications or illness. If bruising occurs in areas always covered by clothing, see a doctor.

## **Wrinkles**

Over time, the sun's ultraviolet (UV) light damages the fibers in the skin called elastin, which provides the stretch and pliability to the skin. The breakdown of these fibers causes the skin to lose its ability to snap back after stretching. As a result, wrinkles form. Gravity also is at work, pulling at the skin and causing it to sag, most noticeably on the face, neck, and upper arms.

**Stop smoking!** Cigarette smoking contributes to wrinkles. People who smoke have more wrinkles than nonsmokers of the same age, complexion, and history of sun exposure and usually look years older than non-smokers – the old "ridden hard and put away wet" look. Cigarette smoke contains over 200 hazardous and deadly chemicals, and cigarette smoke plays a direct role in damaging elastin! Facial wrinkling increases with the amount of cigarettes and number of years a person has smoked!

Many products currently on the market claim to "revitalize aging skin." Remember – if it sounds too good to be true – it probably is! According to the American Academy of Dermatology, over-the-counter "wrinkle" creams and lotions may soothe dry skin, but they do little or nothing to reverse wrinkles. At this time, the only products that have been studied for safety and effectiveness and approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat signs of sun-damaged or aging skin are retinoin or tretinoin creams and the use of various lasers.

Tretinoin cream (Renova or RetinA), vitamin A derivatives available by prescription only, are approved for reducing the appearance of fine wrinkles, mottled darkened spots, and roughness in people whose skin doesn't improve with regular skin care and use of sun protection. However, it doesn't eliminate wrinkles, repair sun-damaged skin, or restore skin to its healthier, younger structure – prevention remains the answer! It hasn't been studied in people 50 and older or in people with moderately or darkly pigmented skin, though we use them frequently in these groups.

Several types of lasers are approved to treat wrinkles. The doctor uses the laser to remove skin one layer at a time. Laser therapy is sometimes performed under anesthesia in an outpatient surgical setting.

The FDA currently is studying the safety of alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs or fruit acids), which are widely promoted to reduce wrinkles, spots, and other signs of aging, sun-damaged skin. Some studies suggest that they may work, but there is concern about adverse reactions and long-term effects of their use. Because people who use AHA products have greater sensitivity to the sun, the FDA

advises consumers to protect themselves from sun exposure by using sunscreen, wearing a hat, or avoiding mid-day sun. If you are interested in treatment for wrinkles, you should discuss treatment options with your family physician.

## **Caring for your skin**

### **Soap and bathing**

If you have dry skin avoid all soaps, detergents, and bubble baths. They take the natural oils out of the skin. Most adults can get by with applying soap only to the armpits, genitals, and feet. Do not use any soap on itchy areas. Don't lather up (the skin often becomes dry for this reason). Don't let a bar of soap float around in the tub. Rinse well. Keep the water temperature cool to lukewarm as hot water irritates the skin

### **Lubricating cream for dry skin**

Buy a large bottle of an unscented lubricating cream. Apply the cream to any dry or itchy areas several times a day, and especially after bathing. You will probably have to continue this throughout the winter. If the itch persists after 4 days, use 1% hydrocortisone cream (nonprescription) for a week. Vaseline is probably the cheapest and best option, but some find it greasy and it can make a mess of clothing and bed linens.

### **Humidifier**

If your house is dry - if you have static electricity - then you need to run a room humidifier in your bedroom. During cold weather, you should wear gloves outside to protect against the rapid evaporation of moisture from the hands.

### **Bath oils**

It does not make much sense to pour bath oils into the bath water; most of the oil goes down the drain. It also makes the bathtub slippery and dangerous. If you prefer bath oil over hand lotion, apply it directly to your skin immediately after baths. Baby oil (mineral oil) is inexpensive and keeps skin moisture from evaporating. You may also use olive oil.

### **Ointments for cracked skin**

Even deep cracks that have been a problem for years can be healed in about 2 weeks if they are constantly covered with an ointment (like petroleum jelly). If the crack seems mildly infected, use an antibiotic ointment (no prescription needed). Apply ointments 4 times a day. Covering the ointment with a Band-Aid, socks, or

gloves speeds recovery even more. For chapped lips a lip balm can be applied frequently.

### **Dry Skin and Itching**

**See our Dry Skin Article**