



# NORTH TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA ASSOCIATES

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## DRY SKIN (XEROSIS)

### What is dry skin?

Too much bathing and soap removes the skin's natural oils. This is the main cause of dry skin. Dry climates make it worse, as does winter weather ("winter itch"). Dry skin is less common in teenagers because their oil glands are more active. Dry, rough, bumpy skin that is most often found on the back of the upper arms is called keratosis pilaris. Dry, pale spots on the face are called pityriasis alba. These conditions are found in a high percentage of people, and do not have a known cause. The dry areas are often itchy, and this is the main symptom of dry skin.

### What parts of the body are most affected?

Cracked skin most commonly occurs on the soles of the feet, especially the heels and big toes (called juvenile plantar dermatosis). Deep cracks are painful and periodically bleed. The main cause is wearing wet shoes and socks or swimming a lot. Cracks can also develop on the hands of children who frequently wash dishes or suck their thumbs. Children who have the habit of licking their lips may get cracked (chapped) lips. Lips may also become chapped from excessive exposure to sun or wind.

### What can I do?

- **Soap and bathing** - Avoid all detergents and bubble baths as they take the natural oils out of the skin. It is okay to bathe daily, but pat the skin, rather than rubbing it, dry with a towel. Don't let a bar of soap float around in the tub. For teenagers buy a special soap for dry skin. Do not use any soap on itchy areas. Don't lather up (the skin of the outer arms often becomes dry for this reason). Rinse well.
- **Lubricating cream for dry skin** - Buy a large bottle of lubricating cream (special hand lotion). Apply the cream to any dry or itchy areas several times a day, especially within three minutes after bathing, while the skin is still wet. You will probably have to continue this throughout the winter. If the itch persists after 4 days, use an over the counter medicated cream.
- **Humidifier** - If your winters are dry, run a room humidifier (be careful if you have mold allergies). If you have static electricity in your home, the air in your home is much too dry. During cold weather, your child 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 bathwater; 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 immediately after baths. Baby oil (mineral oil) is inexpensive and keeps skin moisture from evaporating.
- **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 over-the-counter ointment. Covering the ointment with a bandage, socks, or gloves speeds recovery even more. For chapped lips a lip balm can be applied frequently.
- **Medications** - We will prescribe cream or ointment to stop the itching and other symptoms. You may also need to take pills to help stop the itching. Once the rash resolves, you may use the medication in the future for any itchy spots that may arise.