

Dry, Irritated Hands? Heal Them With These Dermatologist Tips

BY GARY GOLDENBERG, M.D., F.A.A.D. · APRIL 13, 2020



*We're all washing our hands much more frequently these days, and the constant scrubbing and sanitizing can be a recipe for dry, irritated skin. In this edition of our **Doctor's Office** series, **Dr. Gary Goldenberg**, board-certified dermatologist, offers timely tips on how to keep your hands germ-free and well-moisturized. (As a doctor who washes up between patients all day, you might say he has first-hand experience.)*

We know the importance of washing our hands. Whether we're doing it several times a day because of the work we do or for basic hygiene, handwashing plays an important role in helping each of us avoid getting sick and spreading infection to others.

The good news is that we can properly cleanse our hands of germs while also maintaining the health and appearance of our skin.

Wash, Rinse, Repeat—and Moisturize

While essential for keeping clean, both water and soap can negatively affect the skin barrier, the outermost layer of skin cells composed of ceramides, cholesterol and fatty acids. The skin barrier maintains your skin's hydration and health and, when damaged, can lead to your hands appearing red, flaky, cracked and dry.

So, what's a germ-conscious, dutiful handwasher to do? Focus on ensuring that the skin on your hands is both clean and properly moisturized.

Regardless of what we might be hearing about the need to clean well and clean often, there is no reason why you would ever have to use a cleanser that feels like battery acid. Instead, I simply recommend using an effective and mild hand soap.

Even if you don't have access to antibacterial soap, you can feel comfortable knowing that as long as you follow the guidelines we learned as children (use warm water, lather your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, wash the tops and bottoms of your hands and between your fingers), your cleansing regimen will be effective.

When it comes to moisturizing, I always advocate for using something as simple as a light cream or lotion. During the day, you'll want to use a water-based moisturizer on your hands to avoid the greasy feeling oil-based products might provide.

At night, use a heavier, oil-based moisturizer, especially if you have very dry, cracked skin or if you suffer from eczema. Look for products with soothing ingredients such as shea butter, vitamin E or avocado, almond or rice bran oils. And for added barrier repair, you can also wear white cotton gloves over your moisturizer overnight or for a couple of hours while enjoying some downtime.

Expert Advice

If you're noticing inflammation or other skin changes despite your best efforts to care for your hands, talk to your board-certified dermatologist. Even if office visits are not available, your doctor may be able to offer guidance via a phone or video consultation and prescribe over-the-counter or prescription medications.

As always, don't forget to wear sunscreen on your hands—and all exposed skin—every day, particularly if you're spending any time outdoors. Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher to protect your skin from damaging UVA and UVB rays and prevent sun spots from forming on those hands you're taking great care to keep healthy.