

8 Common Causes of Dry Lips, According to Dermatologists

It's an unfortunate fact of life: [Chapped lips](#) happen to good people. Sometimes you can pinpoint the reason, like you ran out of your favorite [lip product](#), but other times you may not have a clue why your lips are parched.

The truth is, dry lips can happen for a range of reasons, making it important to try to determine the cause, says [Ife J. Rodney, M.D.](#), founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics.

Below, dermatologists break down what might be going on. And because knowing why you're struggling is only half the battle, we also tapped them for tips on how to remedy the situation.

Meet the experts: [Gary Goldenberg, M.D.](#), assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital; [Ife J. Rodney, M.D.](#), founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics

8 common potential causes of dry lips

There are a lot of different reasons why you may struggle with dry lips, and sometimes it's even a combination of factors. Some of these are environmental or lifestyle-related (like the below) and are somewhat simple to remedy, but it is possible to develop skin cancer—typically, squamous cell skin cancer—on your lips, according to the [American Academy of Dermatology](#) (AAD). This can look like a rough, reddish, scaly area, and it may feel dry, per the [AAD](#). It's also possible other conditions, like autoimmune conditions, could be to blame. So, don't hesitate to see a

doctor if you're experiencing chronic dry lips. That said, below are other common causes to consider:

You're dehydrated.

Like other areas of your skin, your lips can be impacted by a lack of water. If you're not taking in enough fluids on a regular basis, your lips can reflect that. Cue the dryness and cracking.

Exactly how much water you need per day is variable, though, for what it's worth, the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [recommends](#) that women should aim to have 11.5 cups (92 ounces) of fluids a day, while men should have 15.5 cups (124 ounces) of fluids a day. (That's from foods and drinks.)

You're sunburned.

Your lips can unfortunately fall victim to sunburn. They're susceptible to UV damage from the sun and can get burned if you don't wear proper protection. "Lips are constantly exposed to UV and skin cancer can occur on the lips," says [Gary Goldenberg, M.D.](#), assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital. That's why Dr. Rodney recommends using a sunscreen stick or lip balm with SPF on the area for added protection.



Sun Bum Sunscreen Lip Balm

[\\$4 at Amazon](#)

[\\$4 at Macy's](#)[\\$4 at Target](#)

You've been out in the wind.

Wind can dry out your lips' natural moisture, leading to chapping and peeling, Dr. Rodney says. This can be even more of an issue when the outside air is dry, she points out.

You've been licking your lips.

It seems counterintuitive, but licking your lips can actually dry them out. Your saliva contains enzymes that can break down the natural oils on your lips, Dr. Rodney explains. The moisture you add from licking also evaporates quickly, which can leave your lips feeling even dryer in the aftermath, Dr. Goldenberg says.

You have a vitamin deficiency.

There are a range of vitamin deficiencies that may lead to dry lips, but Dr. Goldenberg says that iron and vitamin B are some of the biggest culprits. Being low in either of these vitamins can raise your risk of lip dryness. The only way to know for sure if this is behind your lip issue is to get a blood test, so book an appointment with your doctor if you suspect this could be the cause.

You're in hot or dry weather.

Similar to being in windy conditions, being out in hot or dry weather can zap your lips of their natural moisture barrier, Dr. Rodney says. If the conditions are hot and dry, the odds of lip dryness are even worse.

It's really cold out.

While hot, dry weather can increase the odds of chapped lips, so can really cold temperatures. Cold weather is usually linked with dry air, and that can fight against your lips' natural moisture, Dr. Rodney says.

You're having an allergic reaction.

It's possible for anything that comes into contact with your lips to cause an allergic reaction, but the lip balm or lipstick you're using could also be a culprit. That's especially true if it contains a fragrance, menthol, or salicylic acid, Dr. Goldenberg says. "These irritate the lips," he adds.

When to see a doctor

Dry lips are uncomfortable, and there's no need to struggle with them. If you've tried to drink more water, use petroleum jelly, and avoid irritants, and you're still not getting anywhere, Dr. Goldenberg says it's time to see a doctor to rule out underlying issues. While dry lips are often due something more minor, like not drinking enough water, there are times when an underlying issue such as an autoimmune condition, medication side effect, or even skin cancer may be to blame. So, it's a good idea to get things checked out.

How to treat dry lips

There are a few things you can do to treat dry lips. "I like to reinforce the protective skin barrier," Dr. Rodney says, like by applying a thin layer of petroleum jelly.

Dr. Goldenberg also recommends doing what you can do hydrate from within. "Drinking plenty of water throughout the day can help treat and prevent dry lips," he says.

While you're at it, try to keep your hands off your lips. "Do not try to pick or peel the skin—that makes things worse," Dr. Rodney says.

How to prevent dry lips

These are the biggest steps dermatologists recommend taking to prevent dry lips:

- Apply a lip balm daily with SPF 30 or higher
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid harsh products, allergens, and irritants

Dr. Rodney is a big fan of using Vaseline on your lips. "It's really simple and fragrance-free," she says. You can also use [Aquaphor Healing Ointment](#) to help with cracking and to retain moisture, Dr. Goldenberg says. He also likes [Sun Bum Mineral Lip Balm SPF 30](#) for its protective zinc oxide base.

FAQs

Should you use sunscreen on your lips?

Just like the rest of your skin, Dr. Rodney recommends using sunscreen on your lips. Many lipsticks and some lip balms will contain this, but double-check your go-to products to be sure. Just like “regular” sunscreen, you’ll need to reapply this, too.

Why might people have dry lips in pregnancy?

There are a few reasons why you might have dry lips in pregnancy.

“Hormonal changes with elevated progesterone and estrogen alter sebaceous gland activity, reducing natural lip oils,” Dr. Goldenberg says.

“The risk of dehydration is also increased during pregnancy, with higher demand on the body.”

How long will it take to revitalize dry lips?

Every situation is different, but you can expect for things to turn around in a matter of weeks. “In general, it can take two to four weeks, since that’s the normal duration of cellular turnover in the skin,” Dr. Goldenberg says.

Bottom line

Dry lips can happen for a range of reasons, but it’s not something you should have to live with. If you’re not sure what’s behind your dry lips or if you can’t seem to get relief, it’s time to consult a dermatologist for help.
