

THE SKIN YOU'RE IN: TIPS ON MAINTAINING HEALTHY SKIN

Your skin: It's the largest organ in the body and the only one that's readily visible to you and the rest of the world. Skin provides attractive packaging that also protects your body from the elements. As middle age approaches your skin also provides the first clues that your body is getting older.

THE AGING SKIN

Like the heart, lungs, kidneys and other organs the skin is subject to a variety of ailments as the body grows older including:

- Wrinkles around the eyes, lines on the forehead, thinning hair, sagging skin on the chin and abdomen.
- Pigment cells: Brown freckles or "Liver spots" that appear after years of sun exposure -- especially on the face and arms.
- Decreased perspiration.
- Skin becomes more fragile and rough, bruises easily, and loses its elasticity.
- Hair becomes thinner and drier in both men and women.

These changes are a natural part of aging. Many skin ailments are also the result of years of exposure to cold, dry air, heat, pollution, sunlight, using tobacco, and other environmental stresses.

MAINTAINING HEALTHY SKIN CARE ROUTINES

Many skin disorders and discomforts can often be prevented with simple skin care routines, lifestyle changes and some tender, loving care.

- Encourage your older parent to avoid hot showers or long soaks in the bathtub that can dry out already-dry skin.
- Choose mild fragrance-free soaps, shampoos and sunscreens.
- If your parent has fine, dry hair he or she may not need a daily shampoo. Towel dry hair instead of using a dryer to keep hair healthy. Permanents and hair coloring can dry out hair.
- After a bath or shower, leave some moisture on the skin and apply a soothing fragrance-free hand or body lotion to keep skin soft.
- Take walks and work outdoors in the early morning or late afternoon to avoid sunburn. Wear a hat and long sleeves – especially if your relative is bald or has little hair and apply sunscreen on arms, hands, and legs.

DIAGNOSIS: SKIN CANCER

A diagnosis of skin cancer can be upsetting to your family member and yourself. The good news is that skin cancer is one of the most treatable and preventable forms of cancer. If the cancer is caught early before it has spread, most tumors can be cured with surgical removal in the dermatologist's office under local anesthesia. Waiting until the growth increases may require more extensive treatments.

A DOSE OF PREVENTION

Regular attention to skin care is important to maintaining your parent's overall good health.

- Schedule an annual skin exam at least once a year with your parent's primary care doctor. He or she may refer your family member to a dermatologist who specializes in skin disorders in older adults.
- Encourage your parent to examine his or her own skin every month using a full-length mirror, and hand mirror in a private, brightly lit room.
- Schedule an appointment with your parent's doctor if you or your parent notices any changes in moles, freckles or birthmarks.
- Wear hats and long sleeves to reduce exposure to the sun.
- Plan outside activities in the morning or late afternoon when the sun isn't as strong.

TIPS FOR CHOOSING & USING SUNSCREENS

A variety of sunscreen products are now available as people are more knowledgeable the effects of the sun on skin. Sunscreen should be applied 15-20 minutes before you go out in the sun. Reapply at least every two hours.

- Choose products containing SPF 15 or higher
- Apply generously on all parts of the body exposed to the sun. Don't miss the part in your hair, back of the neck, or bald spots. Apply protective lip balm.
- Apply sunscreen even when it's cloudy
- Wear a hat, sunglasses and long-sleeved shirt on the beach or pool.
- Apply sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or higher to body and face daily.
- Be sure to use sunscreens even if the weather is cloudy.

If you have young children, use a children's sunscreen that contains zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. They are less irritating and are not absorbed into the skin. Apply sunscreen frequently if the kids are in and out of the swimming pool.

COMFORTABLE IN YOUR OWN SKIN

Understanding the changes caused by the aging process can help you as a caregiver cope with the changes that occur with aging process in this large organ. Although neither of you can turn back the clock you can both work together to manage skin care routines and keep your parent as comfortable as possible. [754-7/29]