



University Hospitals Birmingham
NHS Foundation Trust



Hand Care

Building healthier lives

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www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm

A number of skin conditions such as eczema (dermatitis) or psoriasis can affect the hands and make certain everyday tasks difficult or painful. Symptoms may be improved by following advice in this leaflet on good hand care. Good hand care will help you to control your skin condition and may even clear it all together.

The dos and don'ts of hand care

Do	Don't
Moisturise frequently	Use soaps
Use a soap substitute instead of soap	Wash hands too much
Wear gloves for day-to-day activities and in cold weather	Carry out DIY, gardening or heavy lifting without gloves
Avoid contact with irritants such as soaps, detergents, shampoos, oils and occupational chemicals	Carry out housework or wash the dishes without gloves
Continue good hand care even when your skin condition has improved	Spend too long in the bath or shower, or doing any other sort of wet work

Moisturisers

Moisturisers are also known as emollients. Hand conditions can be improved by applying a fragrance-free moisturiser regularly. Moisturisers protect the hands by forming a barrier which retains the skin's natural moisture and keeps damaging substances away from the skin. Light moisturisers may be best used throughout the day, while heavier moisturisers such as Vaseline may be used at night. If you have also been prescribed a steroid cream, then moisturisers should be used 20 minutes after applying steroid

creams. Your doctor may also recommend you wear cotton or polythene gloves overnight, after applying creams.

Soap substitutes

Soaps, as well as shower gels, cleansing foams and shampoos worsen dry and itchy skin conditions and should be completely avoided. As an alternative, light moisturisers may be used as soap substitutes. These products do not lather and are unscented, but will cleanse the skin. Such substitutes should be used for hand washing and body and may also be used for the rest of the body while showering or bathing. Soap substitutes can make the surface of the shower or bath slippery so it is important to be careful. Use plastic or PVC gloves for shampooing.

Washing hands is best done using luke warm water and drying thoroughly afterwards. A moisturiser should be applied after every hand wash.

Water and wet work

Washing hands too many times a day, even with a soap substitute, aggravates skin rashes. Similarly, hands can also be made worse by prolonged showering, swimming or any lengthy contact with water. Therefore it is best to have short showers (10-15 minutes) and only wash hands when necessary.

Irritant substances

Do not let your skin come into direct contact with substances that are known to irritate the skin such as:

- Shampoos
- Detergents
- Surface cleaners
- Juices from fruits and vegetables when cooking
- Car oil and grease
- Cutting oils
- Paint
- Cement
- Dust

Always use gloves when handling these products. If you have been diagnosed with contact allergic dermatitis, avoid the substance you are allergic to.

Friction

Hand conditions are made worse by any physically rubbing action on the skin. This can be from gripping shopping bags for long periods, lifting objects repeatedly, doing DIY or gardening, handling wood, fibreglass or plasterboard. Padded gloves can help cushion the hands from these forces and should be worn.

Gloves

Always use gloves to protect your skin while doing day-to-day activities. The kind of gloves you should use depends on the activity you are performing, as shown in the table below. Extended use of gloves may lead to sweating which can worsen symptoms such as itch. If gloves are damaged they should be replaced. Cotton gloves should be washed regularly.

Type of glove	When to use
Rubber gloves	For wet work in the home such as washing dishes and cleaning surfaces.
Vinyl or polythene gloves	For food preparation and shampooing hair. Can be used at night after applying creams.
Padded gloves	To reducing friction when doing physical work e.g. gardening or DIY.
Cotton gloves	Can be worn beneath any type of work glove if there is a tendency to sweat, and can be used at night after applying creams.
Winter gloves	In cold and wet weather. Pure wool gloves may irritate the skin and should be lined with cotton gloves.

Long-term care

The measures outlined in this leaflet should be carried out indefinitely – even after the skin condition has improved or settled. This is because the skin may remain sensitive to irritation even after it has apparently fully healed. If preventative measures are followed, there is a very good chance that flares can be avoided in the future.

Your treatment plan

	Recommended product	Notes
Soap substitute		Use this to wash your hands with. This can also be used to the whole body when bathing.
Moisturiser		Apply every half to one hour. Use small amounts frequently. Apply a moisturiser 20 minutes after any anti-inflammatory treatments.
Alternative moisturiser		
Steroid or treatment cream		Apply twice a day to red and inflamed areas, including over any breaks or splits. 1 finger tip of treatment should be used to cover the equivalent of 2 palms of skin. Wait 20 minutes before applying a moisturiser.
Additional advice		

Where can I get further information?

Local resources at Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham

Dermatology Outpatients	0121 371 5469
Dermatology Secretaries	0121 371 5121 / 5122 / 5123

National organisations

British Association of Dermatologists	www.bad.org.uk
Patient UK	www.patient.co.uk

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

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The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4323.

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