

Newsflash

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Fall Less When You're Outside

More than two-thirds of the 120 older adults in a New York University survey said they'd recently fallen when outside. Among other factors, those surveyed blamed steps, slippery or uneven surfaces, ill-fitting shoes, being unaware of surroundings, or carrying too many items. To cut risks, scan for trip hazards in parking lots and garages, ask for help when needed, and wear single-vision glasses (not bifocals) when outside.

Source: Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics



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Why Your Skin Needs More TLC With Age

How to protect your skin from dryness, irritation, and cuts

Like bones, skin often becomes more fragile with age. It may seem more delicate and prone to tears and irritation than it once did, and feel drier and itchier.

"Many factors – including loss of collagen, changes in blood vessels, sun exposure, and medications – combine to affect how well skin does its job," says Sarina Elmariah, MD, PhD, a dermatologist at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Keeping skin healthy is important, because it acts as a barrier between your body and all the potential harms of the outside world.

Treating your skin right can bolster that barrier – at any age. And taking some smart steps can make a big difference. Here's what to do.

MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

Your skin is composed of several layers. Each one becomes thinner over time.

All the layers contain collagen – the protein that provides structure, keeping skin thick and firm. With age and sun exposure, collagen production declines, often causing sagging, wrinkles, and slower healing. In fact, wounds may last up to four times longer in older adults than in younger people.

In addition to the forces of aging and environment, several other factors can contribute to thinning skin. Menopause can make it harder for skin to retain moisture, leaving it almost papery. And many common medications can thin skin or cause it to bruise more easily, including oral steroids (such as hydrocortisone), and some blood thinners (including aspirin).

And skin doesn't just get thinner as you age; it also gets drier. Up to 85 percent of older adults have extremely dry skin (dubbed xerosis). But it's not inevitable: When the outermost layer of the skin is functioning at its best, it keeps moisture in and protects the skin from external assaults (like chemicals, smoke, and other irritants). Improving this layer's strength will help your skin feel less dry and irritated and look better.

CHANGING YOUR HABITS

"Taking proper care of your skin becomes even more important as you age," says Shari Lipner, MD, PhD, a dermatologist at Weill Cornell Medicine and New York-Presbyterian Hospital. "And that may mean changing some of your skin care products and habits."

Forgo long, hot showers and baths; both can dry out and irritate the skin – especially during cold, dry weather. "Limit your showers and baths to 5 or 10 minutes in tepid – not hot – water," Elmariah says.

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Better Breakfasts

How to get a good – and easy – on at home or on the go.

Breakfast really is the most important meal of the day. It not only helps you get your full quota of daily vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients, but it can also help you maintain a healthy weight, control your cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and improve your sensitivity to insulin, which regulates blood sugar.

People who regularly eat breakfast have lower rates of type 2 diabetes and are less likely to develop heart failure than those who do not. But breakfast also has more immediate benefits. It boosts your energy and improves your cognition, memory, and problem solving skills. Breakfast gets the brain going, because it swiftly replenishes the blood's circulating level of glucose, which is depleted overnight and serves as the brain's most immediate source of energy. Breakfast is also the nutritional cornerstone for the rest of your day. For instance, milk provides high levels of calcium, protein, and usually vitamin D (if it's fortified).

Other breakfast standards, including eggs and citrus fruit, contribute various vitamins plus folic acid, which might protect against bone loss and colon cancer. Skipping breakfast deprives you of an opportunity to get those nutrients and increases the chance that you'll reach for less healthy options later in the day, when you're too hungry or busy to eat sensibly.

YOUR BREAKFAST PANTRY

Ideally, you should eat breakfast within the first hour or two of waking. Aim to get 20 to 25 percent of your total daily calories from the meal, and include a mix of protein, complex carbohydrates, and healthy fats. That will keep you fuller than a meal of just carbs.

The easiest way to ensure the healthfulness of your breakfast is to prepare it yourself, at home. That might be especially true if you're watching your weight. A University of Massachusetts study found that people who often ate out in the morning were more likely to be obese than those who didn't. Here are some of the best options.

CEREAL. Cold cereal can be a great breakfast, especially if mixed with low-fat yogurt. Fortified cereals can help you meet the daily recommended levels of key nutrients such as vitamins B12 and C, and folic acid. Look for cereals that provide at least 3 grams of fiber and no more than 4 grams of sugar per serving.

HOT CEREAL. Make oatmeal with milk instead of water and mix with raisins, dried cranberries, slivered almonds or chopped walnuts.

EGGS. Having them for breakfast helps dieters lose weight, possibly because they are so filling and they reduce the chance of overeating later.

YOGURT. Experts recommend nonfat Greek yogurt, which is high in protein. Top with fresh fruit and chopped nuts or seeds. Or mix it into cereal as a higher-protein alternative to milk.

BREAKFAST BREADS. Skip the butter, syrup and whipped cream on French toast, pancakes or waffles in favor of fruit or low-fat ricotta cheese flavored with cinnamon or vanilla extract. Make pancakes and waffles from scratch with whole-wheat flour.

SMOOTHIES. Blend bananas, berries or other fruit with low-fat milk or yogurt. Or for something more unusual, mix crushed ice with avocado, water, whey powder, papaya, and a splash of skim milk.

OPEN-FACED SANDWICHES. Spread peanut butter on whole-wheat toast and top with fresh apple or banana slices. Or put smoked salmon on a whole-wheat bagel with sliced tomato and onion and low-fat cream cheese or soy cheese.

GRAB-AND-GO MEALS. Keep instant oatmeal packets, low-fat cheese, or whole-grain cereal bars on hand for days when you have to eat and run (or eat on the run).

Source: *Consumer Reports on Health*

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Why Your Skin...

You'll also want to re-evaluate some of the products in your bathroom.

Toss out any harsh scrubs. If you want to exfoliate the dead, dry skin, try rubbing a soft washcloth over wet skin, suggests David E. Bank, MD, director of the Center for Dermatology, Cosmetic & Laser Surgery in Mount Kisco, NY. Look for a gentle soap – bar or liquid – that's fragrance-free, because fragrances may irritate sensitive skin and dry it out. And as soon as you towel off, be sure to moisturize from head to toe.

"If you layer your moisturizer on top of still-damp skin, it helps lock in the moisture," Lipner says. Creams are richer and more hydrating than lotions, ointments (such as petroleum jelly) are best at sealing the barrier and retaining water.

A review of 33 studies, published in the *British Journal of Dermatology* in 2013, found that a combination of ingredients that hold moisture in the skin (such as glycerin, hyaluronic acid, and lactic acid) and those that contain fatty ingredients to smooth it (such as cocoa butter, lanolin, and petrolatum) are best at improving dryness and reinforcing this critical barrier. The best skin care strategy uses ingredients from both groups.

CARING FOR WOUNDS

Thin, fragile skin is more prone to cuts and scrapes than healthy skin. But beware of adhesive bandages, which can irritate or cut the skin, Bank says. Look for labels that say "sensitive skin," or cover the wound with a nonstick pad and use paper tape or an elastic wrap (like an ACE bandage) to keep it in place.

In people with diabetes, peripheral artery disease, and some other health issues, wounds can become chronic – generally defined as not healing within three months. Talk to your doctor if a cut is not healing normally.

Source: *ON HEALTH CONSUMER REPORTS*