



Think you have to spend the rest of your life trying to hide ashy elbows and avoiding powder or foundation (because your face is so dry that it flakes right off)? As someone who suffers from dry skin myself, I definitely know how hard it can be. Once the weather starts to get cold and dry, my skin totally freaks out and dries out so easily.

Even though you can't permanently heal dry skin, that doesn't mean you and I need to be miserable. Sure, we may need to give up a few things (like indulging in a long, hot bath, booooo). But dry skin is definitely treatable, and it's actually really easy to get relief.

Besides the obvious fixes — exfoliating dead skin cells, using more lotion, yada, yada, yada — I talked to a few skin care experts to get some totally helpful and easy ways to really kick your dry skin in the, well, general-dry-skin-area. Our panel of experts includes Shalea Walker, esthetician and founder of Walker's Apothecary, Dr. Mitch Chasin, medical director of the Reflections .

Center in New Jersey, Dr. Gary Breslow, owner of a medical spa that treats skin issues, and Nancy Glass, a Clinique skincare expert

With their help, I put together an extensive guide for anyone who suffers from dry skin. It includes everything from how to pinpoint the cause, to how to fix it, and what NOT to do. It even includes the best products for dry skin, in case you were curious. Just admit it — you were so looking for a guide like this. So click here to check out our guide to dry skin care (you can thank me later).

SIGNS YOU HAVE DRY SKIN

This might sound a bit obvious, but in case you like knowing it for a fact, we've got the top signs and symptoms of dry skin. "Dry skin looks flaky and dull," Walker says. It can look red (if inflamed), and "the normally fine lines in the skin become more visible," Chasin says. In severe dry skin, "cracks and fissures can form" as well, Breslow says. Not only does it look dry, it will feel tight. "Think one-size-too-small-for-my-face tight," Glass says.



CAUSES OF DRY SKIN

Weather: Dry skin is "often worse when environmental humidity is low," Chasin says. That's why your hands and face tend to get cracked and itchy during the winter. And those who live in the desert suffer from dry heat.

Neglect: Another cause of dry skin is from "loss of water and protective oils in the outer layer of skin," Breslow says. So when you use harsh chemicals or wash your hands excessively with soap and water, your skin dries out.

Diet: Sweets, smoking, caffeine and alcohol are huge factors in the health of your skin. The latter two "act as diuretics and are guaranteed to make your skin dry," Chasin says.

DRY SKIN TIP NO. 1: AVOID HOT BATHS OR SHOWERS

"Hot, soapy water depletes the natural skin oils to the greatest degree," Chasin says. Taking long, hot showers will "worsen the problem of dry skin by removing the skin's protective oils." But this doesn't mean you have to shower in freezing water. "Tepid water is the most skin friendly temperature for cleansing," Glass says.

Once you find the perfect lukewarm temperature, make sure you don't stay in the shower for too long either. We've found is that it's easier when you shower at night, rather than in the morning when you're sleepy and chilly and all you want is to stand under scalding water for an hour.



DRY SKIN TIP NO. 2: PICK THE RIGHT CLEANSER

"One of the main causes of dry skin is not using the proper cleanser for your skin type," Walker says. Instead of a gel-based cleanser, use a cream cleanser if you have dry skin. Even better, switch to a cold cream. Just massage it into your skin and gently wipe it off without rinsing with water. It will remove dirt and makeup, and infuse your skin with moisture without stripping it. This will guarantee that your skin will always feel "comfortable," not "taut or dry," Glass says.

DRY SKIN TIP NO. 3: PREP AND EXFOLIATE

You might think exfoliating will only make dry skin worse (don't worry, it's a popular misconception), but it's actually an important step when it comes to getting rid of dry skin. Gently exfoliate with an exfoliating scrub or peel weekly. Then "follow with a hydrating mask" to get rid of dull skin, Walker says. Just don't overuse harsh products like astringent or rubbing alcohol, which will totally dry out your skin.



DRY SKIN TIP NO. 4: MOISTURIZE AT THE RIGHT TIME

One reason that your moisturizer doesn't seem to work is because you're not applying it when it's crucial. "It's best to apply moisturizer after a shower or bath while your skin is still moist," Breslow says. Pat (don't rub) your skin with a towel until it is damp, and slather on lotion within the first three minutes of getting out of the shower. This will lock in the moisture.

When choosing the right moisturizer, it helps to choose "shower oils and butters" instead of lotions, Walker says. Those that contain humectants like glycerin will help pull moisture from the environment. Also, look for one that combines oil and water to "provide barrier repair to help skin retain moisture," Glass says.

DRY SKIN TIP NO. 5: DRINK PLENTY OF WATER

This one sounds reasonably easy to do, but we know how hard it can really be. Instead of reaching for that can of soda (which can pack up to 40 grams of sugar, aka skin dehydration at its worst), drink a glass of water instead. For the best results, "drink at least 8 glasses of pure water a day to keep your skin and body properly hydrated," Chasin says.

By increasing your water level, your skin will look healthier, dewier and have a gorgeous glow to it after just a few days. And we just heard that drinking two glasses of water right before a meal can help control your hunger, which means you'll end up eating fewer calories. Score!



DRY SKIN TIP NO. 6: EAT MORE OF THESE FOODS

Who would've thought what you put into your body is important when it comes to preventing dry skin? Doctors, apparently. "I would consume foods with a lot of omega-3 fatty acids and even buy nutritional supplements that have this as an active ingredient," Chasin says. Some other foods you should stock up on? Flaxseed oil, olive oil, fish, citrus, veggies and miso. They work from the inside out to give you soft, moisturized skin. And not only do fish oil pills improve your skin, they'll give you soft, shiny hair in just a few weeks. Need we say more?

DRY SKIN TIP NO. 7: GET MORE SLEEP (WITH A HUMIDIFIER)

There's a reason they call it "beauty sleep." By getting 8 hours of sleep every night, you're letting your skin's cellular repair activity do it's thing without interruption. And did you know your body and face perspire more as you sleep? This natural moisture makes your skin look radiant and even smoothes out wrinkles. Run a humidifier while you sleep (which will add more moisture to the air) and it's like you're using an expensive night cream, but free.



DRY SKIN TIP NO. 8: DON'T FORGET YOUR LIPS

Lips retain less moisture than the rest of your face, so they dry out even more quickly. To get smooth, moisturized lips, exfoliate them by gently rubbing the bristles of a toothbrush against your lips in a circular motion. Then apply a moisturizing lip balm to protect your lips.

IF YOU HAVE CHRONIC DRY SKIN:

If your skin is so dry that it affects the way you live your life, you "should be thoroughly evaluated by a dermatologist to develop the proper treatment plan," Breslow says. It could be a medical-related cause, like psoriasis or eczema, and may require more in-depth treatment.

BEST PRODUCTS FOR DRY SKIN:

We asked our panel of skincare experts what products they swore by, and here's the list they came up with.

"Use bath oils and moisturizers, especially coconut oil, which is I believe is a great, natural product for dry skin." — Chasin

"Routine, daily moisturizing works very well." — Breslow

"Try not to change products too often, give them a chance to work. It takes healthy skin 28 to 30 days to naturally exfoliate, so that is a good time frame to measure a product's results." — Glass