

Seniors and Skin Health

Seniors and skin health: Preventing serious skin conditions in the elderly

It's very important that the elderly take care of their skin because they are more susceptible to skin infection and skin disease due to the changes that take place to skin as we age. It becomes less supple, thinner and dryer. It injures easier and heals more slowly. As a result, seniors are prone to skin problems ranging from itching, scaling and mild dryness to grave skin conditions such as infection and ulcerations. A severe skin infection or non-healing wound in the elderly can be very serious, even fatal.

Common skin conditions of the elderly:

Senile Purpura – are the purplish spots that appear most often on the arms and legs due to thinness of the elder person's skin and frailty of the capillaries and blood vessels just below the surface.

Stasis Dermatitis – is a more common in elderly women than men; it is characterized by dry, itchy skin.



Exfoliative Dermatitis – is more severe form of dermatitis than stasis dermatitis and is characterized by excessive peeling and shedding of skin. It is of particular concern in the elderly because the severe itching can lead to infections.

Skin infections/Infestations – bacterial infections and parasitic infestation such as scabies or ringworm are common in the elderly. Cancerous and noncancerous skin growths.

Viral skin disorders – such as shingles and herpes zoster.

In general, the elderly have special skin care needs because aging skin is so thin and dry. If it becomes too dry, it is prone to cracking and dermatitis, which allows for penetration of bacteria that can result in infection. The elderly should:



- avoid hot baths and frequent showers.
- use only mild soaps, and gently apply moisturisers to the skin after every shower or bath
- take extra care to avoid developing bedsores, particularly for those who are incontinent or bed ridden. These individuals need to be turned frequently to avoid pressure-sensitive ulcers. And it is imperative that absorbent products and catheters be changed frequently.

To promote good skin health, seniors should also:

- Not smoke or quit smoking
- Never expose themselves to the sun without sunblock
- Keep properly hydrated by drinking more liquids
- Use a room humidifier during the winter and in dry climates
- Avoid hot and dry places, such as saunas



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