

## Get the skinny on protecting your skin

By Aaron Warnick

**Y**our skin is like a suit of armor for your body, your first line of defense against germs and other harmful things in your life. Because your skin is on the outside, it can be hard to think of it as a vital organ that needs to be taken care of. But keeping your skin healthy is important.

Nada Elbuluk, MD, MSc, an associate professor of dermatology at the University of Southern California, and a diplomate of the American Academy of Dermatology, has tips to keep your skin healthy.



>> For more tips on keeping your skin healthy, visit [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)

your skin age more gracefully,” Elbuluk says.

The most important part of keeping your skin healthy is protecting it from the sun, which is the leading cause of lifelong skin damage. As you age, you should be ramping up your moisturizing and skin care. Even a step as simple as washing your face twice a day can help keep your skin clear of things that would otherwise cause wear.



### 1 See your dermatologist at least once a year

Your skin is constantly regenerating. In fact, it completely renews every month or so. And because your skin changes so rapidly, you need to keep an eye out for possibly harmful changes, like skin cancer.



“You really should be going to see a dermatologist

at least once a year for skin cancer screenings,” Elbuluk says.

About 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer by age 70. Because sun damage to your skin builds up over time, the risk increases as you age. To prevent it, dermatologists recommend wearing sunscreen daily.

The American Academy of Dermatology says you should use sunscreen that is SPF 30 or higher and protects against both UVA and UVB rays. Hats, sunglasses and long sleeves are other good ways to protect your skin.

### 2 Moisturize, moisturize, moisturize — especially when it's cold

A big part of keeping your skin healthy is keeping it from drying out. And that's especially important in the winter.

“Winter is really hard on your skin,” Elbuluk says.

When you're outside in cold weather, don't go uncovered. The first place you'll notice dry skin is on your hands and lips, so wear gloves and lip balm. It's also a good idea to stock up on moisturizing



ointments or creams. A humidifier in your bedroom can help reduce skin dryness as well.

Take warm showers or baths, Elbuluk says, as hot showers will dry your skin even more. Slather your skin with moisturizer after you get out to help lock the water into your skin.

### 3 Read your product labels and avoid the hype

When you're having a breakout or other skin crisis, it's easy to look for quick answers. But beware of products that may be unsafe.

Potent skin care products are more readily available today than they were in past years, and they often come with big promises that don't deliver, or put you at risk.

Be especially cautious with products that are from outside the U.S. Some countries allow chemicals in skin care products that can be harmful and are banned in the U.S.

You don't want to unknowingly use cosmetic products that have potentially dangerous ingredients, such as mercury.



“Especially when you're buying online, it's easy to find products that you shouldn't be able to buy over-the-counter,” Elbuluk warns.

### 4 Take care of the skin you're in as you age

As people age, their skin changes in a lot of ways. It's not just wrinkles — skin gets thinner, changes color and starts to get spottier. It will naturally loosen too.

And while all of those changes are a natural part of aging, “there are certainly ways to help

your skin changes as you age. It becomes much easier to bruise, and you may develop spots and skin tags. If you have any spots or moles you're unsure about, talk to your dermatologist right away.

Also, don't make things worse for your skin. Never, ever use tanning beds, as they are very damaging and can cause skin cancer. Smoking is another big no-no, as it impairs blood flow to skin, increasing wrinkles and sagging.

### 5 Don't be rash about rashes: Check in with your doc

Rashes can be pretty alarming. Your skin may be red, blotchy or itchy.

If the rash is all over your body, or it's spreading rapidly, you might have a serious infection or allergic reaction. If you notice that it becomes harder to breathe, you could be having a severe reaction, so get help immediately.

You should also see your clinician if you have a rash that's painful or infected, or doesn't go away. Sometimes a rash can turn out to



be a more serious skin condition, such as psoriasis or eczema. “If the rash persists for more than a couple of days, you should schedule an appointment with your doctor,” Elbuluk says.

