

Skin Health for Seniors

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Skin is the bodies largest and fastest-growing organ. It holds our bodies together and protects us from the outside world. It is our first barrier to fight illness and disease. And as people age, so does their skin. With age, the skin becomes less flexible, thinner and dryer. It can injure easily and heal more slowly. Seniors are more susceptible to skin infection and skin disease. They are at risk for skin problems ranging from itching, scaling and mild dryness, to severe skin conditions such as infection and ulcerations. A severe skin infection or non-healing wound in a senior can be very serious, even fatal.

Source: <http://www.parentgiving.com/elder-care/seniors-and-skin-health/> (Accessed 11/8/16)

It is common for older people to suffer from dry spots on their skin, often on their lower legs, elbows and lower arms. Dry skin patches feel rough and scaly. There are many possible reasons for dry skin, such as:

- Not drinking enough liquids
- Spending too much time in the sun or sun tanning
- Being in very dry air
- Smoking
- Feeling stress
- Losing sweat and oil glands, which is common with age

Dry skin can also be caused by health problems, such as diabetes or kidney disease. Using too much soap, antiperspirant or perfume, and taking hot baths can make dry skin worse.

Some medicines can make skin itchy. Because older people have thinner skin, scratching can cause bleeding that may lead to infection.

Source: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/skin-care-and-aging> (Accessed 11/8/16)

Common Types of Skin Conditions

Psoriasis – One of the most baffling and persistent of skin disorders. It is characterized by skin cells that multiply up to 10 times faster than normal. As underlying cells reach the skin's surface and die, their sheer volume causes raised, red plaques covered with white scales. Psoriasis typically occurs on the knees, elbows and scalp, but it can also affect the torso, palms and soles of the feet.

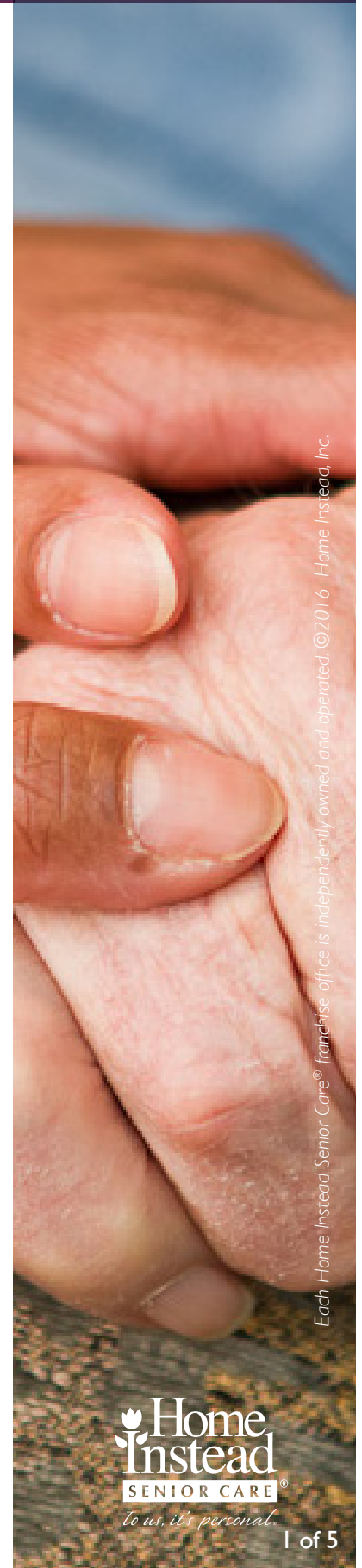
Symptoms:

- Dry, cracked skin that may bleed
- Red patches of skin with silvery scales
- Itchy skin
- Dents, thickening, brittleness and discoloration in nails

Possible causes:

- Genetics
- Skin injury
- Infections

Source: <http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/psoriasis/understanding-psoriasis-basics#1> (Accessed 11/7/16)



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Eczema – A term for a group of medical conditions that cause the skin to become inflamed or irritated. It is not contagious

Symptoms:

- Dry, cracked, itchy, red, inflamed and sore skin

Possible causes:

- Genetics
- Abnormal function of the immune system
- Defects in the skin barrier that allow moisture out and germs in
- Flare-ups –
 - Can be caused by rough or coarse materials
 - Household products like soap or detergent
 - Upper respiratory infections or colds
 - Stress

Source: <http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/guide/atopic-dermatitis-eczema#1> (Accessed 11/7/16)

Pruritus (Itchy skin) – An uncomfortable and often severe sensation of the skin that provokes the urge to scratch.

Symptoms:

- Tingling, swelling and pain
- Red and bumpy rash
- Leathery or scaly texture to the skin

Possible causes:

- Dry skin
- Internal diseases (e.g., liver disease, kidney failure, iron deficiency anemia, thyroid problems and some cancers)
- Nerve disorders
- Irritation and allergic reactions (wool, chemicals and soaps)
- Reaction to drugs
- Pregnancy

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/itchy-skin/symptoms-causes/dxc-20262871> (Accessed 11/7/16)



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Onychomycosis - Fungal infection of the nail. Fungal nail infection is caused by three main classes of organisms: fungi that infect hair, skin and nails, and feed on nail tissue (dermatophytes), yeasts and non-dermatophyte molds.

Symptoms:

- Cracked, bumpy and discolored (yellow/white/green) nail
- Difficulty standing or walking, loss of dexterity and pain
- Lowered self-esteem

Possible causes:

- Family history
- Advancing age
- Poor health
- Trauma
- Living in a warm climate
- Bathing in communal showers
- Wearing shoes that cover the toes not allowing airflow

Source: http://www.emedicinehealth.com/onychomycosis/page4_em.htm (Accessed 11/7/16)

Bedsores/Pressure ulcers – Bedsores are injuries to the skin and underlying tissue. They occur when there is a large amount of pressure applied to skin over a period of time, disrupting the flow of blood through the skin and starving it of oxygen. Ulcers are most commonly found on the heel, ankle, hip and tailbone or any place that is not covered by a large amount of body fat. Body parts in contact with surfaces are most susceptible to ulcer formation.

Symptoms:

- Discolored, itchy skin
- Red or discolored skin
- Skin may be tender, painful, firm, soft, warm or cool compared to surrounding skin
- Blister or deep cavity-like wound
- Surrounding tissue may die and muscles/bones get damaged

Possible causes:

- Sustained pressure – when skin and the underlying tissues are trapped between bone and a surface such as a wheelchair.
- Friction – when skin is dragged across a surface.
- Shear – when two surfaces move in the opposite direction.

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bedsores/basics/causes/con-20030848> (Access 11/8/16)

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Treatment

A physician's diagnosis is required to properly treat skin conditions. When the cause has been determined, the treatment may include: steroid creams or prescription medication.

If an underlying medical condition is suspected, the physician may perform a series of tests including: blood test, tests of thyroid, living and kidney function or a chest x-ray. If a medical condition is present, the disease will be treated, which often relieves the itch.

Role of a CAREGiverSM

- Follow the physician's orders and recommendations for treatment
- If you are assisting a client with baths or showers, you can try to prevent the dry skin from worsening by doing the following:
 - Close the bathroom door to allow the moisture to stay in the air
 - Limit the time in the shower or bath to 5 or 10 minutes
 - Use warm water rather than hot water
 - Use a soft washcloth, rather than loofahs
 - Wash with a gentle, fragrance-free cleanser
 - Gently blot, don't rub, the client's skin dry with a towel
 - Encourage the client to apply moisturizer immediately after drying her skin. Assist if necessary.
- Encourage the client to:
 - Apply lip balm regularly
 - Use only gentle, unscented skin care products
 - Wear gloves:
 - Outside during the winter months
 - When doing tasks that require getting her hands wet
 - When using cleaning supplies
 - Wash her clothes in a non-irritating laundry detergent
 - Use a room humidifier during the winter months and in dry climates
 - Apply sunblock when going outside
 - Stay hydrated
 - Recognize, report and record. Report any changes or concerns to the franchise office as soon as possible.

Source: <https://www.aad.org/public/skin-hair-nails/skin-care/dry-skin> Accessed 10.25.16



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Check Moles, Birthmarks, or Other Parts of the Skin for the “**ABCDE’s**”

A =

Asymmetry

(one half of the growth looks different from the other half)

B =

Borders that are irregular or uneven

C =

Color changes or more than one color

D =

Diameter greater than the size of a pencil eraser

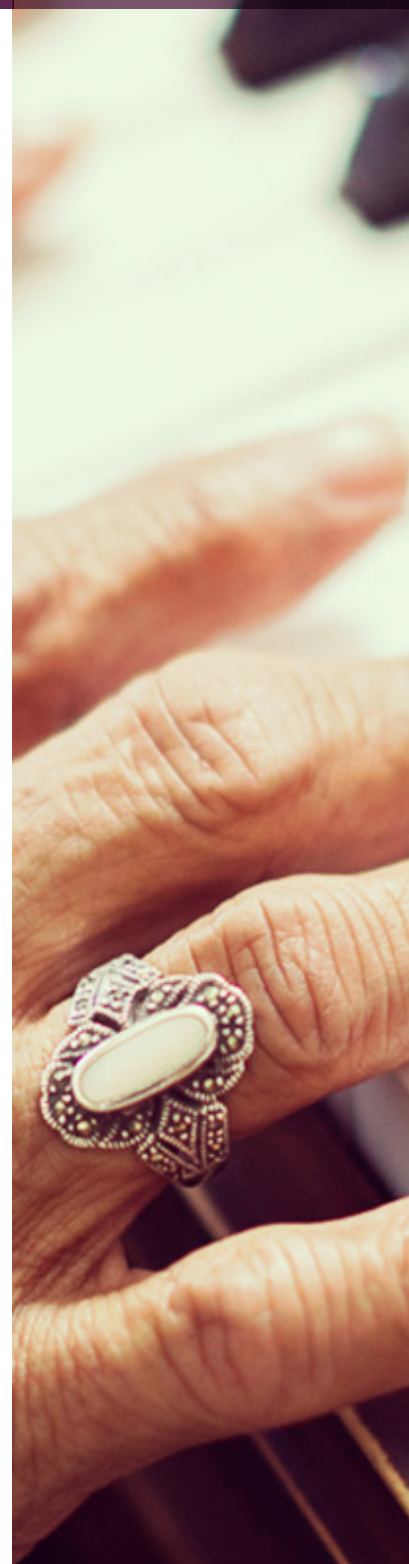
E =

Evolving, meaning the growth changes in size, shape, symptoms (itching, tenderness), surface (especially bleeding) or shades of color

Call the franchise office if you noticed any of these signs on the client.

Source:

<http://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/melanoma/melanoma-warning-signs-and-images/do-you-know-your-abcde#panel1-5> (Accessed 11/8/16)



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