

The Top Three Causes of Dry, Dehydrated Skin

by Dr. Diana Howard

Dry, dehydrated skin can be a temporary condition or a lifelong concern. Dry skin can be genetically determined or a product of an increasingly stressful lifestyle coupled with continual exposure to the sun, wind and chemicals in the environment. It can also be caused by the use of inappropriate products on the skin: meaning it is extremely important that skin care professionals are highly trained in properly diagnosing dry, dehydrated skin for the most effective treatment and product regimen.

Dry, or dehydrated?

Before addressing the causes, it's important to know the difference between dry and dehydrated skin.

- Dry skin, or xerotic skin, generally refers to skin that is lacking in oil.
- Dehydrated skin is characterized by lack of moisture in the Stratum Corneum.

Even oily skin can experience dehydration. As mentioned, dehydration is a lack of water, not oil. This means sebaceous oil activity can still be normal or even overactive in dehydrated skin.

Both dry and dehydrated skin can experience:

- Irritation, inflammation, itchiness and sensitivity.
- A feeling of tightness or tautness.
- A look or feel of roughness.
- Slight to severe flaking and scaling.
- Fine lines, severe redness and cracks that can sometimes bleed.

The top three causes of dry, dehydrated skin:

Intrinsic Aging

Intrinsic aging is the normal process of physical change over time that's more about genetics than lifestyle. (Lifestyle-induced aging is known as premature or extrinsic aging.) Sebaceous gland activity tends to decrease with age, and the skin's natural hydrators decline over the years. The skin's ability to regenerate lipids comprising the protective lipid barrier layer of the Stratum Corneum also declines with age, as does blood flow to the skin, which may cause a drop in sebum production.

Weather/Environmental Elements

Prolonged exposure to the sun causes water to evaporate from skin, which is why sunburned skin requires more moisture than unexposed areas. Cold winds, air conditioning units, forced air

heating and low temperatures can also dry out skin and contribute to premature aging.

Lifestyle

The trend of fat-free diets can deprive our bodies of skin-friendly Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs). This deficiency can result in chronic itching, dryness, scaling, thinning and can lead to an imbalance in prostaglandins (chemical messengers that do many things, such as control inflammation).

Excess intake of alcoholic beverages and certain medications (such as nasal decongestants) can also contribute to dry skin or dehydrated skin.

One of the biggest consequences of dry, dehydrated skin is an increase in sensitivity, as dryness and dehydration are precursors to sensitized skin. Addressing it quickly can help stave off issues of sensitization. However, don't immediately gravitate towards prescribing super-emollient cleansers and creams, as emollient products could aggravate dehydrated skin that's also classified as oily. A thorough skin analysis is your ultimate tool in the successful treatment of this challenging skin condition.