

Caring for your skin

The skin is the largest organ in our body. It has 3 layers:

- Epidermis – this provides a waterproof layer
- Dermis – this contains tough connective tissue, hair follicles, and sweat glands
- Subcutaneous tissue – this consists of deeper fat and connective tissue.

The skin acts as a waterproof, insulating shield, guarding the body against temperature extremes, sun damage and harmful chemicals. Healthy skin protects the body against harmful bacteria and produces vitamin D which converts calcium into healthy bones. Additionally the skin is a sensor with many nerves, which keep the brain aware of its surroundings.

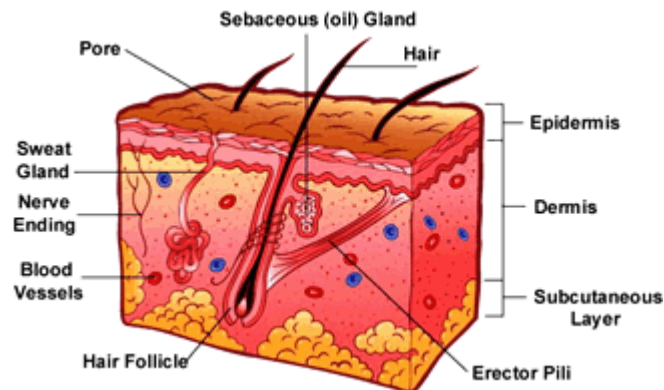


Diagram of the skin

Why is caring for your skin important?

Keeping your skin healthy, unbroken and well moisturised is essential. This reduces the risk of breaks in the skin through which infection can enter the body. Any injury or infection could damage the lymphatic system and increase the risk of swelling.

How to care for your skin

Washing your skin with warm water, or a PH neutral product every day keeps it clean. Ensure that you carefully dry between the fingers or toes to prevent fungal infections. To keep the skin nourished, it is advisable to use a moisturiser (emollient). These help to stop your skin from losing moisture, by creating a protective layer. Moisturise daily and use downward strokes on the skin to stop emollients clogging your hair follicles.

There are different types of emollients:

- Soap substitutes: these are creamy lotions applied to wet skin and rinsed off to prevent the loss of moisture and natural oils
- Lotions: these are suitable for mild, dry skin
- Creams: these are suitable for dry skin and are absorbed easily
- Ointments: these have an oily texture, are effective at holding water, and are useful for very dry skin.

Be aware that moisturisers containing paraffin are flammable. For recommended products, please ask your therapist.

Products to avoid

- Perfumed body lotions as they can dry your skin
- Soap products if you have very dry skin
- Aqueous cream as a soap substitute, as it tends to cause irritant reactions.

Recognising common skin problems

Cellulitis

The area may become:

You may also:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| • red and hot | • have flu like symptoms |
| • more swollen | • have a high temperature |
| • painful | • have red streaks going up and down from the infected area. |

If you notice the above symptoms, we advise to contact your GP, as you may need a two week course of antibiotics.

Fungal infections

Fungal infections can cause a variety of different skin rashes. Some are red and itchy, others produce a fine scale similar to dry skin. Fungal infections can be managed at home using topical treatments which you can buy at the pharmacist. After a bath or shower, dry your skin thoroughly, especially in skin folds. Make sure to wash your clothes and towels regularly.

Contact details

If you have any further questions, please contact the Lymphoedema Service:

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| Sutton | 0208 661 3504 |
| Chelsea | 0207 808 2981 |

Alternatively, please contact:

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|---|---------------|
| The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: | 020 8915 6899 |
| (Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) | |

