

Skin Care and Aging

Your skin changes with age. It becomes thinner, loses fat, and no longer looks as plump and smooth as it once did. Your veins and bones can be seen more easily. Scratches, cuts, or bumps can take longer to heal. Years of sun tanning or being out in the sunlight for a long time may lead to wrinkles, dryness, age spots, and even cancer.

But, there are things you can do to protect your skin and to make it feel and look better. The National Institute on Aging (www.nia.nih.gov) shares this information.

Many older people 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, and losing sweat and oil glands, which is common with age

Dry skin also can 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. [Talk to your doctor](#) if your skin is very dry and itchy.

Here are some ways to help dry, itchy skin: use moisturizers, like lotions, creams, or ointments, every day. Take fewer baths and use milder soap. Warm water is less drying than hot water. Don't add bath oil to your water. It can make the tub too slippery. Try using a humidifier to add moisture to a room.

Older people may bruise more easily than younger people. It can take longer for these bruises to heal. Some medicines or illnesses may also cause bruising. Talk to your doctor if you see bruises and don't know how you got them, especially on parts of your body usually covered by clothing.

Over time, skin begins to wrinkle. Things in the environment, like ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun, can make the skin less elastic. Gravity can cause skin to sag and wrinkle. Certain habits, like smoking, also can wrinkle the skin.

A lot of claims are made about how to make wrinkles go away. Many of them don't work. Some methods can be painful or even dangerous, and many must be

done by a doctor. Talk with a dermatologist or your regular doctor if you are worried about wrinkles.

Age spots, once called “liver spots,” are flat, brown spots often caused by years in the sun. They are bigger than freckles and commonly show up on areas like the face, hands, arms, back, and feet. Using a broad-spectrum [sunscreen](#) that helps protect against two types of the sun’s rays may prevent more age spots.

Skin tags are small, usually flesh-colored growths of skin that have a raised surface. They become common as people age, especially for women. They are most often found on the eyelids, neck, and body folds such as the armpit, chest, and groin.

Age spots and skin tags are harmless, although sometimes skin tags can become irritated. If your age spots or skin tags bother you, talk to your doctor about having them removed.