

**Diagnosis/Definition:**

Dry skin is very common in the Colorado climate. Generally, dry skin is worst in the winter months, but dryness can be a year-round problem. Cracks in the skin can provide openings for irritating substances to get into the skin, and redness and itching can result. In addition, cracks in the skin can be painful, particularly on the skin of the feet and hands.

**Initial Diagnosis and Management:**

**Ongoing Management and Objectives:**

Treatment:

Dry skin needs moisture. The best way to get moisture into the skin is to soak the skin in water. After the soaking, something greasy needs to be applied to the skin to hold the water in the skin. Otherwise, the water will evaporate and the skin will be left drier than before.

1. Soak the skin in water for about 10 minutes. The best way to do this is in a bathtub. Showers provide some moisture, but showers are not as effective as baths. Water should be lukewarm, not hot. Long baths are not good for the skin.
2. Avoid soap as much as possible. The purpose of soap is to remove grease. Unfortunately, soap will remove not only unwanted grease but also the protective oils that your skin naturally makes. Some areas of the skin may be cleaned effectively with water only, and may either require no soap or require soap only every now and then. When soap is used, choose a mild soap or soap substitute.
3. When you get out of the bath, remove excess water by shaking water off or by patting very lightly with a towel. Do not rub dry with the towel, as that will remove the water that can help moisturize your skin.
4. While the skin is still wet, apply an ointment, cream, or lotion to the skin to hold the water in. In general, the greasier the ointment is, the better it will work. For skin that is only mildly dry, lotions (which contain mostly water and a little oil) may work well enough. For skin that is moderately dry, creams (which contain a combination of water and oil) may be a good choice. For very dry skin, ointments (which are oil without water) may be necessary. Ask your doctor's advice about types of ointments, creams, or lotions.
5. For fissures, ointments such as petroleum jelly can help relieve the discomfort. If possible, apply the ointment to the fissure, then wrap a dressing such as a Band-Aid over the area to hold the ointment on and to help keep the skin moist.
6. A room humidifier can be helpful for some people.

**Indications for Specialty Care Referral:**

**Test(s) to Prepare for Consult:**

**Test(s) Consultant May Need to Do:**

**Criteria for Return to Primary Care:**

**Revision History: Created**

**Revised**

**Disclaimer:** Adherence to these guidelines will not ensure successful treatment in every situation. Further, these guidelines should not be considered inclusive of all accepted methods of care or exclusive of other methods of care reasonably directed to obtaining the same results. The ultimate judgment regarding the appropriateness of any specific procedure, therapy, or referral must be made by the physician/provider in light of all circumstances presented by an individual patient.