

Questions & Answers with Sarah Motl, PA-C, Dermatology

Here are some questions Sarah has been asked. We thought we'd share them with you.

Note: Information provided does not in any way replace seeing your dermatology provider or a member of your medical team. For more information please call 768-3900 to inquire about an appointment to visit with Sarah.

Question: I use a daily moisturizer with SPF 30, and don't get sunburned, but lately I've noticed that I am getting large darker patches of skin on my cheeks. Is this from sun or age?

Sarah: These larger darker patches are likely melasma. Melasma may be caused by many factors including sun exposure, heat and hormones to name a few. Strict sun screen/sun protection can help minimize. There are topical cream options and chemical peels that can help fade this once it appears.

Question: How can I treat dark circles under my eyes?

Sarah: There are many potential causes of dark circles under the eyes...to name a few...as we age the skin can appear darker from sun exposure or increased vasculature, the fat pad under our eye can diminish or shift downward causing the area to look more hollow and our skin gets thinner. There are numerous eye creams which can address the pigmentation, loss of collagen, and puffiness. Eye creams can be helpful but think of them more as maintenance/long term prevention instead of a quick fix. Some may need injection of "filler" or fat under the eyes to help with a sunken appearance due to fat loss/shift or bone structure.

Question: My skin gets flaky after I apply liquid foundation. Why and what can I do to prevent it?

Sarah: Moisturize before applying the foundation or apply a product with primer in it prior to application of the liquid foundation.

Question: I get chin hairs. I pluck them but sometimes get a pimple or ingrown hair. How do I avoid this?

Sarah: Unfortunately, plucking or picking can cause inflammation which can induce a breakout. Wash with a salicylic acid cleanser. Consider laser hair removal if the hair is dark.

Question: My teen (age 13) has acne, mainly on her forehead. What products would you recommend for her skin? I really don't want to encourage her to "conceal" her skin so a product without a concealer would be best.

Sarah: A recommendation is a face wash with salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide which is used daily. Moisturize with an oil-free moisturizer after (I like Cerave PM, Cerave cream or Cetaphil cream). You can also buy over-the-counter Differin 0.1% gel and use a pea-sized drop to the entire face (or ½ pea-sized drop if just the forehead) nightly. You must be consistent and do not spot treat so it prevents new acne instead of just treating what is already there. The acne may get worse before it gets better and might take 6-8 weeks to see if it will help.

Question: I am diabetic and know that I need to be careful with my feet. They are always so very dry and cracked and I can't seem to keep them soft and moisturized. I do soak them once a month in epsom salts and moisturize well after but in a matter of days I am back to extreme dryness. What should I look for in a product for my feet?

Sarah: Moisturize with Vaseline as much as possible. You can do a dilute vinegar and water soak to soften callouses (cupful of vinegar in 2 cups of water and soak 10-15 minutes). You can get Amlactin (has lactic acid in it which exfoliates and hydrates) or Eucerin for rough skin (it has urea in it), or Cerave SA (has salicylic acid in it). These gentle exfoliating moisturizers, when used 1-2 time a day over time, can keep the extra skin build up down and keep the skin soft. You have to be consistent though for best results.

Question: How do I know if my makeup is still good to use? I'm pretty sure some of it is over a year old.

Sarah: If there is a change in the consistency/texture/odor of the makeup it is best to get new. Keep in mind if there is sunscreen in the makeup and it is over a year old I would not rely on the spf to protect you.

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Question: If I were to tell my younger self the best time to start using eye cream, when would that be?

Sarah: It's never too early to start! Skin care works best for prevention.

Question: Now that it is getting nice outside again I'll be spending more time in the sun. How often do I need to reapply my sunscreen and what SPF should I be using?

Sarah: Most people only apply 25-50% of the recommended amount of sunscreen. Apply enough sunscreen to cover all exposed skin. Most adults need about 1 ounce – or enough to fill a shot glass – to fully cover their body. Don't forget to apply to the tops of your feet, your neck, your ears and the top of your head. Apply sunscreen to dry skin 15 minutes before going outdoors. Skin cancer also can form on the lips. To protect your lips, apply a lip balm or lipstick that contains sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. When outdoors, reapply the sunscreen approximately every two hours, or after swimming or sweating, according to the directions on the bottle. We recommend using a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, which blocks 97 percent of the sun's UVB rays. Higher-number SPF's block slightly more of the sun's UVB rays, but no sunscreen can block 100 percent of the sun's UVB rays. It is also important to remember that high-number SPF's last the same amount of time as low-number SPF's. A high-number SPF does not allow you to spend additional time outdoors without reapplication. Sunscreens should be reapplied approximately every two hours when outdoors, even on cloudy days.

Question: Is there any way to prevent aging on my hands?

Sarah: Apply sunscreen to the tops of the hands daily especially when driving. You can use your facial anti-aging products on the tops of the hands also.

Question: Many people only cleanse/treat their faces – what about necks? Can I use face products on my neck?

Sarah: Yes, you can use your face products on your neck as long as your neck can tolerate it. Often the neck is more sensitive than the skin on the face so start slow.

Question: I have crepey skin around my mouth! What products or procedures will help with this?

Sarah: I like ZO Firming Serum and Growth Factor Serum to help "plump" this area. Deep chemical peels could help if a series is done. Microneedling or resurface lasers can help too. Be sure to keep skin and body hydrated!!

Question: My skin is dry in the winter and oily in the summer. Do I need to completely change my skin care routine now that summer is here?

Sarah: To reduce oil in the summer use a salicylic acid-based cleanser. Still moisturize in summer to keep the skin balanced. If you "over dry" oily skin the body tends to produce more oil to compensate. Look for moisturizers with hyaluronic acid and/or ceramides and moisture after washing face/bathing within 3 minutes for best absorption. In the winter you may need to switch to a more gentle cleanser and ramp up your moisturizing.

Question: My hands are very dry and flaky in the winter even tho I apply lotion – anything that can help?

Sarah: Try to minimize hands getting wet as much as possible and apply a moisturizing CREAM (not lotion) after every time the hands are washed/get wet/use hand sanitizer ideally within 3 minutes. Can use a moisturizer with salicylic acid, urea or lactic acid daily to help gently exfoliate the hands.

Question: How often should I get a mole checked?

Sarah: Frequency of skin checks depends on personal history and family history of skin cancer. If there is a family history of Melanoma then annual skin checks are recommended. If there is a personal history of skin cancer then every 6-12 months is recommended. If you have clinically atypical (“funny looking”) moles or greater than 50 moles you should have annual skin checks.

Question: How can I avoid or slow down (through preventative care) the process of aging?

Sarah: The top 3 anti-aging things you can do for your skin are: sunscreen/sun protection, topical vitamin C and retinol. Keep your skin clean and moisturized also. Moisturizers with hyaluronic acid and ceramides are very hydrating.

Question: I have little white bumps on the back of my upper arms. Is there any way to get rid of them?

Sarah: The little bumps on the back of the upper arm is called “Keratosis Pilaris.” It is very common, typically affecting 40% of the population. There is unfortunately no cure but if you are consistent you should be able to control them. I would start with Amlactin cream 1-2 times a day to the whole area. Especially put it on after you shower. This cream is a moisturizer but also has lactic acid in it which can exfoliate. Eucerin has a cream with urea in it which works a similar way or Cerave has a SA cream which exfoliates. The key is consistency. It can take weeks to see improvement and you need to keep doing it to keep it away. Next option, if not better, is to mix an acne retinoid (Differin Gel, over-the counter) with a moisturizer and put that on. You could also try chemical peels.