



PREVENTIVE ASPECT OF SKIN INFECTIONS

*¹Dr. Krishna Namdeo Kadam and ²Dr. Viraj Vilas Jadhav

¹Assistant Professor, P.G. Dept. of Rog Nidan Vikriti Vigyan, Government Ayurved College, Nanded, Maharashtra.

²Professor, Department of Sharir Rachna, Dhanwantary Ayurved College, Chandigarh.

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Krishna Namdeo Kadam

Assistant Professor, P.G. Dept. of Rog Nidan Vikriti Vigyan, Government Ayurved College, Nanded, Maharashtra.

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INTRODUCTION

You can prevent many skin problems by maintaining a healthy lifestyle, practicing daily skin care, protecting your skin from the sun, and checking your skin for signs of cancer or other problems. Wear sunscreen when you are outdoors. Do regular skin self-exams, and if you see anything that's suspicious, ask your dermatologist to check it out. You also may want to use a moisturizer that contains antioxidants to help protect your skin. A nutritious diet and regular exercise also play key roles in keeping your skin healthy.

The reasons behind your skin's behavior provide not only clues to a prescription but a way to prevent a problem from happening. If you learn that using a certain type of topical ingredient or eating a particular kind of food exacerbates a condition, you can avoid it. For instance, eating spicy food and drinking alcohol tend to make rosacea worse. If that happens to be the case for you, managing the problem is clear: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Infections begin when the body is invaded by microscopic organisms such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites that do not naturally occur in the body. Skin infections are usually caused by three different types of germs including: bacterial, viral, and fungal. Many skin infections are mild and can be cleared in a few days or weeks with home remedies or over-the-counter medications. However, other infections require professional medical attention because when left untreated, they can become severe. For example, a skin infection that spreads to the bloodstream or bone can become life-threatening. By taking the proper precautions, one can learn how to stop the spread of germs and reduce the likelihood of skin infections.



Common Tools for the Prevention of Skin Infections: Taking Care of Basic Hygiene

1. Cleaning of Hands

A. Keep your hands clean to reduce skin infections

One of the easiest ways to prevent the infection of skin is to practice good hand hygiene such as washing your hands frequently. Alternatively, you can use hand sanitizer when soap and water aren't available.

Wash your hands frequently. After wetting hands and applying soap, rub hands together for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to rinse thoroughly with warm water. Dry hands using a paper towel or air dryer.



Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water aren't accessible.

After applying the sanitizer, rub hands together until they are dry. Be sure to apply product to all surfaces of the hand including in between fingers.

In some public places, such as hospitals and nursing homes, there is often a sanitary station where you can keep your hands clean. These are usually foam-based sanitizers which sometimes have moisturizer in them, too. Utilize these stations when you can.



Moisturize dry skin - Although washing hands often helps reduce skin infections, it can also lead to dry skin. Dry skin may result in cracks in the skin, which can allow bacteria to enter the cut.

Use a moisturizing lotion often to prevent cracks and peeling of the skin. Avoid lotions that have a long list of ingredients including many perfumes and fragrances. Plain moisturizers such as petroleum jelly work best.

As a rule of thumb, creamy moisturizers tend to have more preservatives so grease-based moisturizers tend to be more effective.



Avoid contact with overly used surfaces. Some germs can survive on surfaces anywhere from hours to days. By avoiding skin-to-skin contact with surfaces like locker room floors and doorknobs, you can decrease your chance of coming into contact with infectious germs.

Clean or use a barrier (like gloves or napkins) when touching overly-exposed surfaces. Items like restroom doors, restaurant menus, and cell phones are full of bacteria. Avoiding direct contact with such items can reduce the spread of germs.



Sanitize surface areas often by using household disinfectants or wipes such as Lysol.

C. Avoid sharing personal items. Even though people are taught from a young age that "sharing is caring," sharing personal hygiene items or items that come into contact with bodily fluids can often lead to the transmission of germs.

- Personal hygiene products always contain germs. Avoid sharing items like make-up, hair brushes, towels, and deodorant. Never share toothbrushes or razors.
- Sharing drinks and eating utensils easily spreads saliva which is a common host of germs.

2. Avoiding Specific Infections

Fungal infections come from airborne organisms and typically start off in the lungs or skin. Athlete's foot, yeast infections, and ringworms are examples of common fungal infections. Athlete's foot is contagious and can be spread contaminated floors, towels, and clothing.



Bacteria is not always bad; in fact, bacteria is naturally found in the human body and less than 1% has the ability to make people sick. It is the "bad" strains of bacteria (such as *Streptococcus* or *Staphylococcus*) which causes skin infections like Cellulitis, Erysipelas and Impetigo.

However, skin infections can also spread to your joints, bones, or blood. Additionally, you should be careful if anyone you know as MRSA, which is a resistant bacterial infection.

Viral infections are caused by organisms that are small containers with genetic material within. They invade healthy cells, reproduce, and eventually kill the cell to make you sick.

Common skin infections caused by viruses include chickenpox, cold sores, measles, and rubella. There are currently no vaccinations for cold sores, so be aware if you come across this infection.

Know Your Risk



Those who are constantly around warm and moist conditions (such as athletes) are more susceptible to infections. Also, people with weakened immune systems (such as those with diabetes, cancer or HIV) are more likely to have a skin infection.

Many athletes report infection because bacteria tend to thrive in warm and moist areas. Avoid infection by washing frequently, sanitizing shared spaces and equipment, and laundering uniforms after each use. For example, athlete's foot typically occurs as a result of your sweaty feet being confined in tight-fitting shoes.

Those who have conditions which lower the strength of their immune system are more susceptible to infection because their body cannot produce enough of an immune response to the bacteria and viruses to fight infection. Follow the same tips to prevent infection but also take additional precautions such as wearing shoes, keeping raw foods away from prepared foods, and avoiding pet waste.

Take Care of Your Feet

Fungal infections usually take the form of "athlete's foot" because fungus tends to shed spores and the most common place for this to occur is in shoes. Keeping your feet and shoes clean and dry, and avoiding going barefoot can assist in reducing infections.

- Keep your feet as cool and dry as possible. Change socks often, and wear shoes that breathe easily like leather as opposed to plastic.
- Avoid walking barefoot, especially on shared public surfaces such as at the gym or the pool. Instead, wear slippers or place towels on the floor.
- Practice good toe hygiene, such as clipping toenails straight across and avoiding ingrown toenails. Avoid sharing clippers and other manicuring products.

Care For Your Skin

- When skin is damaged, bacteria can cause infection through untreated cuts and scrapes. Quickly clean and dress damaged skin to avoid infection. Also, use sunblock and lotion as often as possible to avoid damaging skin.
- Wash lacerations with soap and rinse thoroughly with water to clean the area. Use tweezers to remove any foreign debris like dirt. Be sure to not apply too much pressure to avoid pushing germs into the cut.
- Apply an antiseptic or antibiotic ointment to the abrasion and the surrounding area of skin. This may destroy any bacteria and prevent skin infections from developing.
- Cover an open sore or cut with a bandage to keep it clean and dry and to prevent bacteria or fungus from entering the open wound. Change the bandage as needed if it becomes dirty or wet.
- Skin is more susceptible to bacterial infections when damaged by sunburn, inflammation, or scratching so taking the necessary precautions to prevent skin

damage can assist in decreasing your chances of bacterial skin infection.

- Make sure that you're always up to date on your tetanus shots.

Boost Your Immune System

The immune system is a network of cells, tissues, and organs that work together to protect the body. When your immune system is weakened, your body is more susceptible to all infections, especially viral infections. By getting the proper amount of rest and nutrients you can avoid viral infections.



Ensure the proper mix of nutrients. If you don't get enough vitamins and minerals through diet, take a multivitamin that is high in nutrients like vitamin C and D.

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