

Skin: How to Care for Our Largest Organ

Healthy skin is vital for our survival both emotionally and physically. To boost these capabilities, we need to understand its role and importance in our overall health and learn how to better care for our skin.

By Deborah Burnes,

What's the big deal about skin? Every gust of wind, cough and blast from an exhaust pipe hits our skin first. Biologically, our skin is our first line of defense. Culturally, skin defines much of our standard for beauty. Bright, youthful skin signals healthy and vitality. And, like every part of our bodies, skin responds to care and attention. Proper treatment can revitalize skin and slow the aging process, keeping skin healthier, longer.

Our skin holds our bodies together, shielding us from the outside world. It is our protective covering, our first barrier to fight illness and disease, and a passageway to our bloodstream. Our skin works so well that it's easy to take skin for granted. But the difference between neglected and pampered skin is incredible -- once you experience the joy of supple, breathable skin, you'll be hooked. Your whole body functions more smoothly when your skin doesn't have to fight to perform its natural function.

Skin covers about [18 square feet](#) of the human body. It is composed of two main layers: the epidermis (outer) and the dermis (inner). The cells in the epidermis are continually replaced with cells produced in its bottom layer. This process slows as we age. Exfoliating dead skin cells helps speed up the process, promoting youthful skin. The dermis contains nerve endings, sweat glands, hair follicles, and blood vessels. Together, these two layers provide us with protection and comfort.

Simply put, healthy skin is vital for our survival both emotionally and physically. To boost these capabilities, we need to understand its role and importance in our overall health and learn how to better care for our skin. What we put on our skin is just as important as what we put in our body; both affect the well being of our entire body (skin included!). The next time you slather on that chemical laden lotion or soak in a toxic tub, remember that your skin absorbs a large percentage of what you put on it. Here is a closer look at how much we rely on our skin:

- **Protective Barrier**

The skin defends from a plethora of harmful things each day. On top of that, skin is a protective barrier that helps preserve our internal fluids and organs.

With everything from chemicals in the skin care products we slather on, environmental toxins and pollutants, harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, pathogens, antigens and UV radiation attacking it, skin needs to be in tip top shape to ward off illness and keep us healthy.

- **Removing waste**

Skin is a passageway that rids our body of toxins and helps prevent chemical and waste build-up.

Clean pores enable your body to expel waste; keeping your pores clean provides a clear exit strategy for all kinds of yucky toxins that accumulate in our bodies. Pores that are congested and blocked with chemicals and pollutants prevent skin from functioning properly and removing toxins.

Continual epidermal shedding also aids in removal of pathogens that may have colonized the skin. Excellent hygiene aids epidermal shedding, ensuring that your skin can function properly to remove pathogens.

- **Protection from injury**

Our skin provides the first signal to our brain that we're being hurt. This signal helps us react quickly to prevent a worse injury.

When we feel the heat of a fire, we're careful not to get too close. When we feel the pressure of sharp object, we move away to avoid being impaled. Keeping skin healthy increases the sensitivity to outside threats, which enables our bodies to react more quickly to dangerous situations.

- **Diagnostic tool**

The skin is a barometer for overall health. Early warning signs of many diseases manifest themselves on the skin, providing practitioners with invaluable diagnostic information.

- **Vitamin D**

Vitamin D is vital to our immune system. With proper sun exposure, skin plays a large role in manufacturing Vitamin D.

- **Comfort**

Skin is the body's natural heating and air conditioning system. It regulates our temperature, helping us prevent over heating and freezing by maintaining consistent inner body temperature regardless of the outside temperature.

In cold weather, skin constricts and forms goose bumps; small hairs raise to trap the warmth emanating from our bodies, conserving our energy. In the heat, our skin relaxes and sweat flows freely through our pores.

Evaporation of sweat (changing from a liquid to a gas) absorbs heat energy. This process cools the surface of our skin. Again, healthy skin is the key to making sure these processes function smoothly and efficiently.

- **Natural anti-bacterial**

Our oil glands secrete oil that contains bacteria to fight off disease. Harsh chemicals, soaps and skin care products that deplete our bodies' natural protective oils demolish this natural defense strategy.

- **Pleasure**

Touch is one the most meaningful ways we connect to other people. From a first handshake, to a warm hug, touch helps us greet loved ones and communicate support.

In times of grief, touch can be incredibly comforting and stabilizing. In times of joy, touch communicates an infectious sense of excitement and elation. Touch is also a gateway to arousal and sexual pleasure. It's difficult to overestimate the depth of emotion conveyed through simple touches.

- **Who we are**

So much of how we feel about ourselves is wrapped up in our appearance. Not only does our skin hold our body together, it also holds our emotions together.

Those of us who suffer from or treat skin ailments such as rosacea, acne, psoriasis and eczema, understand the emotional as well as physical effect skin has on our wellbeing. Blemished skin can make us depressed, unwilling to leave our homes and be around others. This may result in missed work or school, anxiety, stress and a limited our social life.

The solution involves a combination of emotional and physical treatments. Of course, most of us could benefit from a shot of self-confidence about our appearance, but the truth is, this kind of confidence comes from within.

That said, there are many natural methods to combat the maladies listed above as well as maintain healthy skin and slow the aging process. Invest in your skin to boost your overall physical and emotional health.