

GETTING A better HANDLE ON PROTECTING YOUR HANDS

BATTLE PREMATURE AGING WITH
SUNSCREEN, MOISTURIZERS AND
DRINKING PLENTY OF WATER

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The hands are one of the most sun-exposed parts of the body, but people often neglect to care for them, which can lead to premature aging. Genetics, skin type, excessive dryness and smoking are also factors.

“Exposure to the elements, extreme hot and extreme cold causes advanced aging of the skin,” says Tricia L. Cox, an oncology nurse practitioner with HCA Virginia Cancer Network in Richmond.

Dr. Joseph Musgrave, a dermatologist with Williamsburg Dermatology Inc., says that a “high percentage” of people often either forget or don’t put on adequate amounts of sunscreen on their hands.

“Most people just don’t apply enough of it,” he says. “Most people also tend to apply sunscreen to their face and their neck but tend to forget the other parts of the body. The backs of the hands and the arms get just as much exposure to the sun as the face and the neck. Sunscreen should be applied evenly and in the proper amount, 1 oz. of sunscreen for the whole body. But most people don’t do that.”

Spots or prominent veins may appear on the hands if they are left unprotected in the sun for too long. Skin products containing vitamin C or kojic acid can reduce spots after three months of daily use. To avoid such problems, sunscreen use is recommended every day, even when the sun is not out. Musgrave suggests sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or more, or 50 or more for those who are most susceptible to sun damage. When it comes to moisturizers, look for those that contain SPF.

“Moisturizing lotions or creams are very beneficial if applied routinely,” says Cox. “The first ingredient of most

lotions and creams is water, which is hydrating. Addition of emollients provides a barrier or shield, protecting the skin, and when the skin is protected, the signs of aging should slow. Apply cream after washing hands, whenever hands feel dry during the day and at night before bed.”

Drinking plenty of water—at least six to eight glasses a day—is also beneficial.

“A little-known fact is that skin also responds to the amount of water we drink, so personal hydration is also important,” says Cox.

There are non-invasive procedures such as laser treatments and peels that may alleviate the sight of spots and veins. Rough, reddish patches on the skin may be precancerous and should be removed, says Musgrave, but small flat brown lesions such as freckles are usually harmless.

PROTECTION IS KEY

“The worst time to be out in the sun is from [10 a.m. until 3 p.m.], so you want to try to avoid the sun at that time, which will help,” says Musgrave. “That is important.”

Wear rubber gloves when doing dishes, cleaning with chemicals or working in the garden, and wash your hands with warm, not hot water, as hot water can strip the skin of its natural oils.

“The best advice is to begin your skin program early in life prior to the ‘ravages’ of time,” says Cox. “Use sunscreen daily on your face and hands. Use sun-protective equipment such as umbrellas, long-sleeve clothing and hats for overall protection. Use emollient lotions and creams daily. Avoid extreme hot and cold conditions. Drink plenty of water daily. Don’t use tobacco or stop if you are currently using tobacco products. Seek appropriate medical care should you wish to explore additional options.”



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