

# 66th ANNUAL MEETING

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **DON'T POUT ABOUT IRRITATED LIPS: DERMATOLOGISTS CAN OFFER TOP TIPS TO HELP KEEP LIPS IN TIP-TOP SHAPE**

**SAN ANTONIO (Feb. 1, 2008)** – While winter's harsh, windy weather is often to blame for dry, cracked lips, sometimes the cause of lip irritation is harder to pinpoint. In fact, several types of foods, cosmetic products, medications or even bad habits have been linked to dry lips. The key is determining the source of the irritation and modifying your daily regimen to eliminate the problem.

Speaking today at the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology, dermatologist Margaret E. Parsons, MD, FAAD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the University of California at Davis, discussed the most common causes of lip irritation, available treatments and preventative measures to keep lips healthy.

"When I treat a patient for dry lips, the first thing I try to determine is what this patient might be doing or not doing that could be contributing to the problem," said Dr. Parsons. "In some cases, it might be a new lipstick that contains an ingredient irritating to the skin or an anti-aging facial product that inadvertently comes in contact with the lips that could be the culprit. Or, someone might be working outdoors or participating in sports and not protecting their lips from wind and sun damage with a lip balm, especially one with sunscreen. Once we determine the cause, there are some simple, tried-and-true treatments that work well for most patients."

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## **Mother Nature**

Dr. Parsons noted that not only can winter's outdoor elements contribute to dry, cracked lips, but the conditions indoors during this season can play a role in irritating the lips. Heat used to warm the indoor temperature dries out the air and lowers the humidity level, which can lead to dry skin and lips. At the other end of the weather spectrum, the intense summer sun can lead to sunburned or sun-irritated lips.

"When working outdoors or engaging in sports, men and women should apply a lip balm with an SPF of 15 or higher year-round to protect their lips from sun damage," said Dr. Parsons. "By wearing lipstick – particularly the products in recent years with sunscreen – women have protected their lips better than men, which could explain why men have significantly more skin cancers on their lips than women."

## **Cosmetics**

In some cases, products that you put on your lips – lipsticks, lip balms or the newer lip plumpers, which are applied topically to make lips appear fuller – can cause dry or irritated lips.

"Lip plumpers often contain chemicals used to intentionally irritate the lips and make them appear fuller, such as capsaicin (derived from chili peppers), mint, or menthol, among others," explained Dr. Parsons. "For some, this irritation is mild, causing a slight swelling and fuller appearance. For others, this irritation is significant and causes painful swelling and redness."

Dr. Parsons added that the ingredient phenol used in some of the traditional lip balms and other lip products can irritate and actually contribute to further drying out the lips. Even though phenol is used in low concentrations in lip products, it is the same chemical used in deep-penetrating facial peels that removes the top layer of skin.

## **Foods**

Spicy foods, the acid found in citrus foods and even the cut edge of a mango peel (which contains the chemical toxicodendron found in poison ivy) can burn

the lips and lead to dryness and irritation. In addition, people with nut allergies could react to lip products that contain nut-based products, such as shea butter.

### **Medications**

Although many people might not suspect their medications to be the root of their lip problems, Dr. Parsons explained that patients who cannot attribute their dry or irritated lips to other common factors should take a close look at their medicine cabinet. For example, some oral acne medications, such as isotretinoin, can cause considerable lip dryness even though they do not come into direct contact with the lips. Products applied topically, such as acne medications containing benzoyl peroxide or retinoids and anti-aging products such as alpha-hydroxy acids or retinoids, could cause considerable lip dryness when they come into contact with the lip area. Vitamin E and aloe vera gel also can be irritating to many people with sensitive skin.

Similarly, patients with eczema or other skin conditions that make the skin more sensitive could be more susceptible to allergic reactions from lip products. Dr. Parsons advised patients with any underlying skin conditions or who regularly use medications to check with their dermatologist to determine if these are contributing factors to their lip problems.

### **“Lip-Smacking”**

Another cause of dry, chapped lips that is common in younger children is what dermatologists refer to as “lip-smacking.” This habit, which can be hard to break the more the lips become irritated, can be formed when children are nervous about something, such as starting school. In particularly bothersome cases, a mild prescription product may be needed to accelerate the healing process.

### **Tips and Treatments**

In most cases, applying petroleum jelly or a lip product containing petrolatum or mineral oil will soothe and heal irritated lips. Dr. Parsons also recommends the following tips to prevent lip irritations and to keep lips healthy and moisturized:

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- Opt for lip products, such as lipsticks or lip moisturizers, which contain sunscreen whenever possible to protect lips from harmful sun exposure.
- Be smart about what you put on your lips. Avoid lip plumpers or other products that intentionally irritate lips to make them appear fuller, as the chemicals they contain can be irritating to some people.
- Apply a petrolatum-based product at bedtime, which Dr. Parsons refers to as the perfect time for patients to “grease up” their lips.
- Choose a simple product with few additives to minimize possible irritation.
- See a dermatologist if lips are not getting better with simple at-home treatments or if new symptoms develop.

“Caring for your lips shouldn’t be an after-thought,” added Dr. Parsons. “By incorporating good lip care into your overall skin care regimen, you can maintain healthy lips, avoid some of the common sources of irritation and protect your lip area from possible skin cancers.”

Headquartered in Schaumburg, Ill., the American Academy of Dermatology (Academy), founded in 1938, is the largest, most influential, and most representative of all dermatologic associations. With a membership of more than 15,000 physicians worldwide, the Academy is committed to: advancing the diagnosis and medical, surgical and cosmetic treatment of the skin, hair and nails; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education, and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care for a lifetime of healthier skin, hair and nails. For more information, contact the Academy at 1-888-462-DERM (3376) or [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org).

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