Mature Skin: What You Can Expect & What You Should Do to Stay Healthy

- The US census data reports that the 65 and over age group is expected to double by the year 2030. In addition, the 85 and over age group is the fastest growing sector of the US population.
- Mature skin is physiologically different from young skin and needs to be treated in a specialized manner.
- The incidence of skin problems tends to be higher in older adults than in other age groups.
- There also are certain skin conditions and tumors that generally only occur in older adults.

Changes
- Aging causes changes at every level of the skin:
  - The epidermis, the skin’s outer layer, does not recover from injury as rapidly. The outermost layer of the epidermis loses lipids (fat-like substances), making the skin drier.
  - The dermis, the skin’s inner layer, loses collagen and elastic tissues that keep the skin plump and protect against injury.
  - The sweat glands are not as efficient at producing sweat, increasing the amount of time it takes to cool off the body on a hot day.

Common Conditions
- Skin cancer
  - Most often caused by sun exposure during their 20s, 30s, and 40s.
  - Since mature skin has less protection from the sun than younger skin, wear a sunscreen daily with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15 that provides broad-spectrum protection from both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays.
  - Older adults should do a full body skin exam twice a year. If a person is unable to conduct a skin exam, he or she should ask a dermatologist to perform one instead.
- Shingles (Herpes Zoster)
  - Shingles is caused by a reactivation of the chicken pox virus and is characterized by a painful, blistering rash.
  - It’s common for older adults to experience chronic nerve pain even after the rash and lesions are gone.
  - The nerve pain caused by shingles is hard to treat since it normally does not respond to common painkillers.
  - The herpes zoster vaccine, which is a boosted dose of the chicken pox vaccine given to children, was approved by the FDA in 2006 for use in - more-
adults age 60 and older. This vaccine can significantly reduce the chance of getting shingles and the resulting pain.

- **Skin infections**
  - An older adult’s skin takes two to three times as long to heal as the average adult.
  - Older adults should monitor their skin for infections since simple cuts can turn into chronic wounds.
  - Since skin in the lower extremities takes longer to heal, people with diabetes should have their physician perform regular foot checks to prevent the development of ulcers.
  - To prevent infection, keep the wound moist by covering it with a bandage and using an antibiotic ointment.
  - Call a dermatologist if the wound becomes red, warm, or produces drainage, since those are signs of a possible infection.

- **Fungal infections**
  - They are common in the groin area, feet, toes and nails and also can occur in other areas where skin rubs together.
  - Chronic fungal infections can lead to itchy skin and skin breaks.
  - Clipping toenails regularly and using protective barriers, such as zinc ointment, in areas where skin rubs together can help prevent fungal infections.

- **Dry, itchy skin**
  - Skin is naturally drier in older adults, so the use of harsh drying soaps is not required every day, and will only further dry the skin.
  - Those who like to bathe daily should avoid using very hot water and spending lengthy time in water.
  - Older adults should use less abrasive soaps, such as a non-soap cleanser, and a moisturizer with lipids immediately after bathing.

- **Physiological changes in the skin also increase a person’s likelihood they will experience conditions such as vascular problems, benign growths and tumors, and contact dermatitis, as they age.**

**Treatments**

- At least 85 percent of all mature patients are on some sort of medication, so it’s recommended that all older adults bring in a list of their current medications at each appointment with their dermatologist.

- Treatments of simple disorders may have to be altered for mature patients:
  - This group has an increase in other medical conditions that will affect treatment options.
  - Therapies for other medical issues may cause further skin conditions.

- Cosmetic procedures can remove sun damage and add plumpness in aging skin. Patients should choose a physician who specializes in mature skin because treatment techniques and healing times vary depending on age.

**See your dermatologist for successful diagnosis and treatment of skin, hair and nail conditions.**

**Find a dermatologist by visiting the American Academy of Dermatology’s Web site at [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org).**

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