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Women's Hand and Nail Care

What to buy for soft, pretty hands.

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WebMD Feature

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Growing awareness that frequent hand washing prevents the spread of germs can wreck havoc on our hands. Harsh bar soaps can irritate the skin, leaving hands red, dry, and prone to chapping or cracking. And popular antibacterial soaps can irritate dry skin.

The safer we are with germs, the worse the wear on our hands. What's a woman to do? Here's what you need to know for pretty hands.

Bar Soap vs. Liquid Cleansers

Amy Derick, MD, a dermatologist in private practice in Barrington, Ill., advises her clients to avoid antibacterial soaps. Instead, she suggests they use a moisturizing liquid cleanser to wash hands if they have normal skin. And if they have dry or sensitive skin, she suggests using a hand sanitizer instead of soap for routine hand washing when they're out and about.

For women who prefer bar soap, look for moisturizing soap that contains the emollient glycerin, and humectants such as petrolatum, sunflower oil, and soybean oil.

Moisturizers and Hand Creams

The best thing you can do for your hands, especially as you get older, is to moisturize them throughout the day and before you go to bed. Any cream or lotion will do, but creams formulated for the hands have some advantages: They usually are non-greasy and quick absorbing.

Rich hand creams contain some of the same ingredients used in advanced skin care products for the face. Why? There is less fatty tissue underneath the skin on hands, so veins are more noticeable and the skin starts to look crinkled as we age.

Moisturizing creams can -- at least temporarily -- make the hands look plumper and more youthful by drawing water into the skin. If you're prone to eczema, you may need a specially formulated hand cream or oil with hydrocortisone to minimize itching.

For plumping, look for hand creams containing hyaluronic acid, which gives the skin support and body.

To moisturize the skin of your hands, look for hand creams with petrolatum, glycerin, shea butter, or safflower seed oil.

Be sure to buy hand cream with a broad-spectrum sunscreen, SPF 15 or higher, to prevent photoaging of your hands.

Antiaging Products for a Woman's Hands

Hands are exposed to UV rays almost as much as our faces: when we drive, when we carry packages, and simply go about our lives. And as with facial skin, the skin on the top of our hands shows signs of sun damage -- particularly age spots -- before other parts of the body. But there are some simple things you can do.

Brightening or lightening creams for the hands may fade age spots if used regularly, and some are gentle enough to apply twice a day. (However, they don't work nearly as well as laser treatments by a dermatologist.) Hand creams that fade age spots and reduce blotchiness contain hydroquinone, which helps lighten age spots, or alpha-hydroxy acids, which boost cell turnover. Hydroquinone has been linked to cancer in animal studies, so some women avoid it. However, Jeffrey Dover, MD, an associate clinical professor of dermatology at the Yale University School of Medicine, says he's convinced that the concentration used for skin lightening is safe.

To minimize the signs of photodamage, dermatologists suggest using a hand cream containing retinol or retinyl propionate, though the benefits are subtle compared to prescription treatments.

To whiten age spots, look for lightening hand creams containing kojic acid or liquorice extract, combined with hydroquinone.

Nail Care for Women

Nails are made of dead cells. So how you nourish the inside of your body is important. Studies have shown that biotin, also known as vitamin B7, can help treat and prevent brittle nails. Good sources of biotin are foods such as brewer's yeast, green peas, oats, soybeans, walnuts, sunflower seeds, bulgur, and brown rice. Be sure to check with your doctor first before taking biotin or any other dietary supplement.

Proper manicure techniques are also important for healthy hands and nails. The leading cause of hangnails and ingrown fingernails is clumsy nail trimming. Make sure the manicurist gently pushes back the cuticle rather than cutting it, which may lead to an infection.

If you do your own nails, look for nail "nippers" that have a curved handle and a cutting jaw shaped to follow the natural curve of nails. You can find them at drugstores and beauty supply shops.

Our nails naturally become more brittle with age. Ingredients in some nail polish and polish remover can speed the process, drying out our nails. Elle, a celebrity manicurist who writes a blog for Barielle Cosmetics, suggests her clients use polish that is free of formaldehyde, toluene, and dibutyl phthalate. She also recommends using a nail polish remover free of alcohol.

To moisturize your fingernails, Elle suggests using a cuticle cream, petroleum jelly, or vitamin E oil. Put it over the entire nail, including the cuticle, and gently rub it in.

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My Notes:

The moisturizer in other body washes
just sits on top of your skin's surface.

THEIR MOISTURIZING
INGREDIENT



