

Skin care

A guide for parents of children with spina bifida

Why is skin care so important?

We have to take care of our skin, so that it can take care of us!

Skin is a protective shield that:

- ✓ warns us of harm by sensing pain, heat and cold
- ✓ keeps dirt and germs outside the body
- ✓ keeps water and fluids inside the body
- ✓ helps to warm and cool our bodies
- ✓ protect us from the sun
- ✓ covers our inner body



Make skin care a part of your child's daily routine!

What are the main skin care issues for my child?



The main skin care issues for your child are sensation and mobility. Learn more about them on the next page.

Talk with your child's health care team about how these issues affect your child and what you can do to help.

Your child's care will be planned to meet his or her unique needs.

Sensation

- Your child may have less sensation in his or her buttocks, legs and feet. Help your child pay close attention to these areas. These areas have a greater chance of getting hurt without being noticed right away.
- Check your child's skin daily. Involve your child in checking his or her skin during daily care.
- Make sure your child's wheelchair, cushions, braces and shoes fit well and stay in good condition.
- Assess your child's surroundings because he or she may not be able to feel them. Remove items that are too hot or cold.
- Dress your child in pants, socks and shoes for crawling. Avoid rough or uneven surfaces.
- If your child has difficulty moving, turn and reposition your child's body a few times during the night. This relieves pressure areas on the skin during sleep that your child may not feel.
- Check for toileting accidents. Protect your child's skin with barrier cream as needed.
- Dress your child in clothes made of cotton or other 'breathable' fabrics.

Mobility

- Movement will relieve pressure. Ensure your child changes position often.
 - Range of motion activities can help prevent skin breakdown in the folds of your child's joints.
 - Talk to your child's Physiotherapist to learn how to cushion, transfer and move your child in ways that protect his or her skin.
 - Help your child maintain a healthy weight for his or her age and size.
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What does routine skin care involve?

1. Keep skin clean and dry

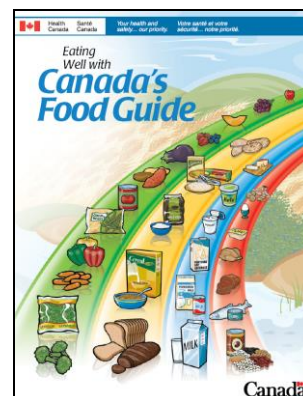
- Wash your child each day, and whenever his or her skin gets dirty. Use a gentle soap and warm water. Rinse well and gently pat dry.
- You may use an unscented lotion on your child's skin.
- Change your child's clothes or sheets when they get wet.
- Keep your child's nails clean and trimmed.

2. Check the skin

- Carefully go over the skin on your child's body every day. Look for any changes in colour or breaks in the skin.
- Check the skin every time you change your child's clothing. Pay special attentions to areas under braces and over bony areas such as hips, buttocks, knees and feet.
- Teach your child how to do this. Show your child how to use a mirror to check areas he or she cannot see. Making skin care a healthy habit is part of growing up and becoming independent.

3. Keep skin healthy

- Skin needs good nutrition to stay healthy. Offer your child a variety of healthy foods and drinks such as water. Give your child extra water when the weather is warm.
- Follow [Eating Well With Canada's Food Guide](#) for healthy eating. Your healthy care team may give you a copy of these guidelines.



4. Protect the skin

- Gently touch your child's skin when cleaning, dressing and moving.
- Make sure your child's clothes and shoes fit well (not too tight) and suit the weather.
- Put on sunscreen, a hat, sunglasses and protective clothing when your child will be outdoors in the sun for more than a few minutes.

When should I get help?



Watch for these red flags!

- Watch for changes in your child's skin.
For example, bruising, skin colour (such as a red area under a brace that doesn't disappear after 30 minutes), blisters, burns and sunburn, sores and temperature changes.
- Medications can affect your child's mobility and circulation. Keep your child's medication list up-to-date and discuss it with the health care team.
- Watch for changes in your child. Fever, change in appetite, increased irritability and sleepiness can be signs of infection.

If you have any concerns or questions:

- Call your family doctor
- Call a member of your child's hospital health care team
- Go to your nearest hospital emergency department

Where can I get more information?

- Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Canada: www.sbhac.ca
- Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integrated Network (HNHB LHIN): www.hnhblhin.on.ca/
- Government of Ontario, Ministry of Children and Youth Services (for financial and respite support): Call 1-888-789-4199