

Skin care

A guide for children and teens 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 daily routine!

What are my main skin care issues?



Your main skin care issues are sensation and mobility. Learn more about them on the next page.

Talk with your health care team about how these issues affect you and what you can do to about them.

Your care will be planned to meet your unique needs.

Sensation

- You may have less sensation in your buttocks, legs and feet. Pay close attention to these areas. These areas have a greater chance of getting hurt, unless problems are noticed right away.
- Check your skin each day during your personal care.
- Make sure your wheelchair, cushions, braces and shoes fit well and stay in good condition.
- Assess your surroundings because you may not be able to feel them. Remove items that are too hot or cold.
- Avoid moving on rough or uneven surfaces.
- If you have difficulty moving, turn and reposition yourself a few times during the night. This relieves pressure areas on your skin during sleep that you may not feel.
- Protect your skin with a barrier cream if you may have toileting accidents.
- Wear clothes made of cotton or other 'breathable' fabrics.

Mobility

- Movement relieves pressure. Change your position often.
 - Do range of motion activities to help prevent skin breakdown in the folds of your joints.
 - Learn how to transfer and move in ways that protect your skin.
 - Try to stay at a healthy weight for your age and size.
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What does routine skin care involve?

1. Keep your skin clean and dry

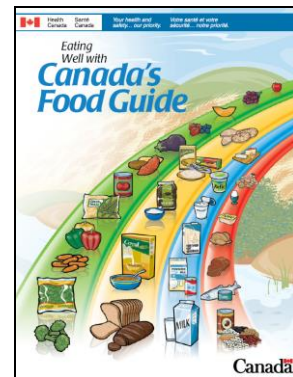
- Wash your skin each day and whenever it gets dirty. Use a gentle soap and warm water. Rinse well and gently pat dry.
- You may use an unscented lotion on your skin.
- Change your clothes or sheets when they get wet.
- Keep your nails clean and trimmed, but not too short or you could get an ingrown toenail.

2. Check your skin

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

3. Keep your skin healthy

- Skin needs good nutrition to stay healthy. Eat a variety of healthy foods and drinks such as water. Drink extra water when the weather is warm.
- Follow [Eating well with Canada's Food Guide](#) for healthy eating.



4. Protect your skin

- Touch your skin gently when cleaning, dressing and moving.
- Make sure your clothes and shoes fit well (not too tight) and suit the weather.
- Wear sunscreen, a hat, sunglasses and protective clothing when you are 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 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 mobility and blood flow. Keep a list of your medications up-to-date and discuss it with your health care team.
- Watch for signs of infection such as fever, a change in appetite, and feeling more irritable or sleepy.

If you have any concerns or questions:

- Call your family doctor
- Call a member of your 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 (formerly CCAC): www.hnhblhin.on.ca/
- Government of Ontario, Ministry of Children and Youth Services (for financial and respite support): Call 1-888-789-4199