Let's Talk About...

Spina bifida and skin care

General skin care is essential to any child's health. Children with spina bifida are more prone to skin problems because they have limited movement, weak muscles, lack of feeling, and poor circulation.

Skin breakdown can occur because of pressure, burns, or trauma. The following health tips will help your child prevent skin problems.

How can my child prevent skin breakdown from pressure?

1. You or your child should check his skin daily for redness, dryness, or any draining area.
2. You or your child should check the skin that touches clothing folds, socks with wrinkles, shoes, and braces.
3. Encourage your child to shift his weight from side to side every 30 minutes. If sitting in a wheelchair, have him do wheelchair pushups (lift up from seat of chair with arms or armrests) or pressure releases (change position in the chair).
4. Gradually increase the time your child uses a new brace. Check for reddened areas (pressure marks). If there are no pressure marks, continue to use the brace. If pressure marks appear, remove the brace and contact the clinic nurse or therapists so they can make changes.
5. Have your child use a good cushion when riding in a car and encourage him to do pressure releases.
6. Make sure your child's wheelchair is properly fitted and has a good cushion.

How can my child prevent skin problems from burns?

1. Have your child wear sunscreen, a hat, long sleeved-shirt, and long pants, if necessary, if he is going to be in the sun for a long time.
2. Ensure bath water is not too hot. If your child is young, supervise him so he does not turn the hot water on while bathing. If your child is older, teach him how to check the water temperature.
3. Have your child avoid close contact with steam from a stove or dishwasher.
4. Do not use heating pads, electric blankets, or hot water bottles with your child.
5. Check metal connectors and seat belts in cars and on wheelchairs that have been exposed to the sun. Park the car or wheelchair in the shade whenever possible.
6. Have your child wear shoes or socks when walking on concrete or sand and water socks in a swimming pool.
7. Do not place hot plates or cups on your child's lap.
8. Have your child avoid direct contact with hot surfaces such as playground equipment, sidewalks, streets, truck beds, car or motorcycle exhaust pipes, and wheelchair footplates .

How can my child prevent skin breakdown from bumps and scrapes?

1. Keep your child's feet clean and dry. Trim his nails straight across to prevent hangnails.
2. Cover your child's feet whenever he is in a swimming pool.
3. Have your child wear shoes outdoors at all times and avoid sharp objects.
4. Take care of your child's cuts, bumps, scrapes, or scratches immediately to prevent further problems.

What should my child look for when he is inspecting his skin?

Carefully inspect feet and legs morning and evening for skin irritation, blisters, redness, and pressure spots. Check between the toes for sores, cracks, and lint. If a red spot does not go away in 10 minutes, keep your child from putting pressure on that area. Identify the source of pressure and get rid of it. If the red spot is from shoes or braces, call the brace shop and arrange to have the brace readjusted. If your child develops an open sore ask your doctor for specific recommendations.

As your child becomes aware of his body, talk about skin inspection while you are doing it. When your child is able to dress himself, help him inspect his skin every day. Use a hand-held mirror so your child can see all areas of his skin, including the backside. This should become part of his daily routine. He should tell you about any skin irritations, blisters, redness, or pressure spots. To help your child learn, you can put tiny stickers on all areas of the body that he should inspect. Make sure you remove all stickers after inspection. As your child gets older and spends less time at home, remind him to watch for pressure sores, burns, or irritations to his skin.

How should I treat blisters, abrasions, or irritations?

1. Prevent your child from wearing shoes or braces until all irritations have completely cleared.
2. Avoid adhesive bandages, corn pads, and tape on the feet. You may use small gauze dressings held in place with your child's socks, if needed.
3. Expose irritated areas to the air as much as possible at least three or four times a day for about 20–30 minutes. Mealtime, naptime, and nighttime are good times to expose the feet. When your child is playing on the floor, keep his feet and legs covered. Use padded slippers.
4. Have your child soak irritated areas in warm water for at least 10 minutes morning, noon, and evening. This will clean the irritated area and promote healing.
5. Completely dry areas that have been soaked. Air-drying is best.

Contact your doctor if you are having difficulty getting the sore to heal or if you see pus in a sore.

Intermountain Primary Children's Medical Center
The Child First and Always®

© 2012 Intermountain Healthcare, Primary Children's Medical Center. All of the information contained in the ***Let's Talk About . . .*** series is for educational purposes only. This educational information is not a substitute for medical advice or for care from a physician or other health care professional. If you have questions about your child's health, contact your health care provider.

Pediatric Education Services, 801.662.3500 | Rev. 2/12, LTA520408009 | *Available in Spanish*