

Let's Talk About...

Spina bifida and skin care

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 tips can help your child prevent skin problems.

How can my child prevent skin breakdown from pressure?

To help prevent your child from having skin breakdown:

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

How can my child prevent skin problems from burns?

To prevent burns:

- Have your child wear sunscreen, a hat, long sleeved-shirt, and long pants, if needed, when staying in the sun for a long time.
- Ensure bath water is not too hot. Watch young children carefully to make sure they don't turn hot water on while bathing. Teach an older child how to check the water temperature before filling the tub.



- Don't let your child get too close to steam from a stove or dishwasher.
- Don't let your child use heating pads, electric blankets, or hot water bottles.
- 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.
- Have your child wear shoes or socks when walking on concrete or sand and water socks in a swimming pool.
- Don't put hot plates or cups on your child's lap.
- Make sure your child avoids direct skin contact with hot 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?

To protect your child from bumps and scrapes:

- Keep their feet clean and dry.
- Trim their nails straight across to prevent hangnails.
- Cover their feet in a swimming pool.
- Have them wear shoes outdoors at all times.
- Keep the ground outside free of sharp objects.
- Take care of your child's cuts, bumps, scrapes, or scratches immediately to prevent further problems.

How should I teach my child to inspect their skin?

Teach your child to inspect their skin as part of their daily routine once they become aware of their body and can get dressed on their own. When they are first learning, you can put tiny stickers on all areas of your child's body they should inspect. Just remove them after your child looks at their skin.

Your child should:

- Carefully inspect their feet and legs each morning and evening for skin irritation, blisters, redness, and pressure spots.
- Check between their toes for sores, cracks, and lint.
- Use a handheld mirror to see all areas of the skin, including their bottom and lower back.
- Tell you about any skin irritations, blisters, redness, or pressure spots.
- Watch for pressure sores, burns, or skin irritation at school or while away from home as they get older.

If a red spot doesn't go away within 10 minutes, your child shouldn't put pressure on that area. If the red spot is from shoes or braces, call the brace shop and arrange to have it readjusted. Call your child's doctor if your child develops an open sore.

How should I treat blisters, abrasions, or irritations?

To treat your child's skin problems:

- Have your child stop wearing shoes or braces until all irritation is gone.
- Avoid adhesive bandages, corn pads, and tape on their feet. You may use small gauze dressings held in place with your child's socks, if needed.
- Expose irritated areas to air at least 3-4 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 their feet and legs covered and use padded slippers.
- 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.
- Completely dry areas after soaking them in warm water. Air drying is best.

If a sore isn't healing or you see pus or fluid in it, call your child's doctor.

Questions for my doctor

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