

## Healthy Skin

Many of us may take healthy skin for granted, until we have a problem that becomes difficult to treat. Why is healthy skin so important? It is important because our skin protects our bodies in several important ways by:

- Protecting us from disease and infection by preventing bacteria and chemicals from entering the body;
- Preventing the escape of needed fluids from our tissues;
- Helping maintain the temperature inside our body; and,
- Sensing pain, pressure, heat and cold.

Changes in our skin can tell us important things about the conditions inside our bodies. Our skin condition can indicate if we have problems with nutrition, hydration, circulation, infection, and disease. People with developmental disabilities may have certain conditions or situations that make it more likely for skin problems to develop.

### Factors Influencing Skin Condition

There are a variety of important factors that can affect or influence the condition of a person's skin. Awareness of the following factors can help with prevention and early detection of problems that may require treatment:

- **Nutrition:** Skin problems are more likely to develop in people who have a poor or inadequate diet, including insufficient intake of fluids.
- **Hygiene:** Maintaining clean skin prevents bacterial contamination that may otherwise lead to infection.
- **Moisture:** Frequent moisture or dampness may cause irritation, rashes, and skin breakdown. People who excessively perspire or who are incontinent may be especially at risk. It is important to make sure that clothing and bedding are kept dry.
- **Mobility:** Limitations in mobility may lead to skin problems that result from continued pressure on the skin from underlying surfaces, lack of circulation, and friction. Frequent changes in body position are necessary. Some people may need assistance from others to change body position at least every two hours.
- **Age:** As we age, skin becomes thinner and drier, bruises and chaps more easily, and heals more slowly. Mild soaps and lubricating lotions may be needed.
- **Medications:** Many widely used medications may cause an increased sensitivity to sunlight resulting in rashes, hives, and sunburn. Medication bottles should be checked for warning labels. Use of sunscreen and protective clothing while outdoors is useful in protecting skin.
- **Medical conditions:** The presence of other medical conditions such as diabetes or hypothyroidism may contribute to a variety of skin problems. Your health care professional can alert you to any special risks.
- **Responses to discomfort:** A sensory impairment may limit a consumer's ability to feel pain or discomfort. In addition, some consumers may not clearly communicate these feelings to others. As a result, skin problems may develop because warning signals are not recognized.
- **Assistive and supportive devices:** The use of special devices that contact the skin may cause problems if the device does not fit properly, if it traps moisture, if it places too

much pressure on the skin, or if it rubs the skin. It is important that these devices be checked frequently to ensure that they fit well and are being maintained in good condition.

Making sure skin remains healthy is an essential part of maintaining good health. Talk to your health care professional whenever there are changes in skin condition. Your health care professional can advise you about any needed treatments or routine hygiene practices that can help.