

Caring for hands that care



As healthcare professionals across the world continue the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, hand hygiene and care has never been more important. Adopting frequent and proper hand hygiene should be part of day-to-day practice in the prevention and spread of infection.

As we head into winter there will be outside factors that can contribute to skin becoming dry and irritated. As perioperative practitioners our hands are a vital tool or instrument which is why hand care is so important.

Skimping on hand hygiene and care can put you, patients and other healthcare workers at risk.

The skin protects us from infection, so when our skin becomes irritated, dry, chapped and cracked our hands can carry more pathogens than those with undamaged skin.

How to keep your hands and nails healthy “whilst on and off-duty”.

- Use mild gentle soap when washing your hands. Use warm tepid water and avoid exposure to hot water as this strips the skin of natural oils and causes damage.
- Hand sanitizer can be used to maintain hand hygiene and can be less damaging to the skin as it dries quickly in the air. Always have one in your pocket or bag.
- Always pat your hands dry. Never rub with a towel as this can irritate and dry out the skin.
- Avoid hand dryers that blow hot air as this can also damage your skin.
- Exfoliate your hands at least once a week. This will keep your skin looking revitalised.
- Look after and pamper your cuticles. Push cuticles gently back so they frame the nails. Avoid trimming, which can leave the area open to infection.
- Keep hand lotion everywhere! Place a hand cream pump at every sink in your house and at work (use approved lotion supplied). Have hand lotion dispensers or tubes on your desk or in your drawer to remind you to moisturise. Put travel-size tubes in your work bag, purse, handbag, and carry heavy duty moisturiser in your pocket so you never forget to moisturise your hands. Develop good habits during your shift.
- Always remember to wear sunscreen, as we often forget this one.
- Many beauty magazines state another great hand care technique is to apply a coat of Vaseline before going to bed, and wear cotton gloves on your hands. This is something that is often used with people who have skin conditions.
- Massage your hands using creams or oils inbetween and up and down your fingers and the rest of your hand in a circular motion, this will help relax and release any stress or pain in your hands.
- Keep your fingernails short, free from nail varnish and acrylic or gel-coated nails. Clipping the whole nail in one fell swoop can be too aggressive, causing it to tear and peel. Instead, use an extra-fine emery board and file the nail into a rounded shape. Mirror the curve at the base of your nail to get the best natural look, as rounded nails are less likely to break than squarer shapes. If you do need to cut, do so in several small snips across the nail.
- Wear domestic gloves while cleaning and washing dishes as chemicals and hot water can strip away the protective lipid barrier from your skin, making it susceptible to irritation and dryness.

Remember, maintaining your daily hand care routine will avoid dry damaged skin.