

# Partners in Quality Care



Objectives:

- Overview of the Integumentary System (Skin)
- Skin care and the aide's role
- Common disorders of the skin
- Changes in skin with aging

### **Integumentary System – Common Disorders**

- Eczema – red, itchy areas on the surface of skin
- Dermatitis – inflammation of skin
- Tears and abrasions
- Pressure ulcer (also called pressure sore, decubitus ulcer, bed sore)
  - A serious wound caused by poor circulation, resulting from pressure
  - Typically at points where body bears much of the weight (pressure points), called bony prominences (areas of body where bone is close to the skin) – elbows, shoulder blades, sacrum, hips, knees, ankles, heels, toes, back of head, and back of neck
  - Stages – 1 through 4 (5 and 6 also – by some sources)

### **Integumentary System – Nurse Aide's Role (Follow the plan of care for your client)**

- Older adults do not need complete baths every day, but a couple times a week, supplemented with sponge baths on non-bath days
- Use lotions for moisture
- Be gentle with movement and care because of fragility of skin
- Gently brush hair daily to stimulate scalp
- Layer clothes for extra warmth
- Encourage fluids
- *Inspect skin every time care is provided*
- Observe for and report early signs of pressure ulcers – pale, white, or reddened skin (light skin) or purple skin (darker skin)
- Prevent pressure ulcers by turning/repositioning dependent clients at minimum of every two (2) hours; performing regular skin care; keeping skin clean and dry; keeping linens dry, clean, and wrinkle-free; using pillows to separate skin surfaces; and encouraging fluids and good nutrition

The Integumentary System covers the entire body and protects internal structures from damage by harmful invaders or substances; regulates body heat; relays body sensations; manufactures vitamin D for healthy bones; and holds in body fluids.

### **Integumentary System – Overview**

- The skin
- Largest organ and system in the body
- Responsible for providing a natural protective covering of the body

### **Integumentary System – Structure**

- Three layers – epidermis, dermis, subcutaneous (fatty) tissue
- *Accessory structures include hair and nails*

### **Integumentary System – Function**

- Protects body from injury and pathogens
- Regulates body temperature
- Eliminates waste through perspiration
- Contains nerve endings for cold, heat, pain, pressure and pleasure
- Stores fat and vitamins

### **Integumentary System – Normal Findings**

- Warm, dry
- Absence of breaks, rash, discoloration, swelling

### **Integumentary System – Changes Due to Aging**

- Skin is thinner, drier, and more fragile
- Skin loses elasticity
- Fatty layer decreases so person feels colder
- Hair thins and may gray
- Folds, lines, wrinkles and brown spots may appear
- Nails harden and become more brittle
- Reduced circulation to skin, leading to dryness and itching
- Development of skin tags, warts and moles

### **Integumentary System – Variation of Normal (report any of these observations noted with your clients to your supervisor)**

- Breaks in skin
- Rash, itching or skin discoloration
- Pale, white or reddened areas
- Black and blue areas
- Dry or flaking skin
- Ulcers, sores, or lesions
- Swelling
- Fluid or bloody drainage
- Abnormal temperature
- Changes in scalp or hair

Skin contains pigment, blood vessels, nerve endings, fatty tissue, sweat glands, oil glands, and wax glands. Hair covers the skin to protect skin, eyes, ears, nasal passages, and external sex organs.

### Points to Remember

- The skin is the body's first line of defense against injury
- The skin's color and condition can be an indication of the general health of the body
- Fatty tissue acts as insulation to keep in body heat
- Healthy skin is essential for a healthy body
- Sweat glands secrete sweat to cool the body
- Skin breaks down very easily in some locations when a sick person becomes unable to move easily
- Skin is nourished from the inside with a good diet and plenty of fluids
- Skin is always covered with germs. Washing with soap and water is an effective method of preventing the spread of infection.

### Skin disorders:

- Shingles- caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox. Although you can't really "catch" shingles, there is a possibility that the virus can be spread to a person who has not had chicken pox. Shingles is usually gradual and the client may start out with feeling fluish with a headache and perhaps light sensitivity. Shingles is treated with antiviral medicines and medicines for pain. Because clients who start antiviral medicines quickly can heal faster, let your supervisor know right away if your client complains of these symptoms. You can assist the client in keeping the skin clean and, if assigned on your plan of care, helping to remind the client to take their medications. Let you supervisor know if your client complains of pain as the physician can order additional medications.
- Dermatitis- itchy inflammation of the skin (examples-poison ivy, dandruff, eczema); may cause itching, pain, stinging or burning, blisters, thick or scaly skin, sores from scratching, swelling. There are three main categories of dermatitis (contact dermatitis, seborrheic dermatitis, atopic dermatitis- eczema). You may be asked to assist your client, if on the plan of care, in applying topical moisturizers. The products need to be free of alcohol, perfumes and dyes. Remind your client not to scratch! Be aware that some antihistamines may assist with the itching but may also make your client drowsy and at *risk for falls*. Avoid strong soaps or detergents when bathing or when doing laundry.

### Changes in the Integumentary System for Older Adults (65 and over)

- Most of the changes that occur in this system do not produce major physical problems. Rather, they are outward signs of the aging process. There is a redistribution of fatty tissue under the skin. These fatty deposits are gradually lost from the face, arms, and legs; they seem to "reappear" in the abdomen and hips. Loss of fatty tissue, especially in the arms and legs, and changes in metabolism may cause the older person to complain of being cold, even when it is warm outside.
- Glands do not produce as much oil to lubricate the skin naturally. So, the skin becomes dry and flaky. The elbows, hip bones, and shoulder blades become more visible because of the lack of fatty tissue covering the bones. Also, the skin loses its elastic quality, and blood vessels near the surface of the skin are move visible, especially in the hands and arms.
- The fingernails become ridged and brittle, while the toenails tend to become hard and thick. They can be very difficult to cut.
- Prolonged exposure to the sun's damaging rays hastens the aging of the skin, especially of the face. Wrinkles and crow's feet around the eyes are the results of repeated use of facial muscles over a long period of time.

### Suggestions for helping the client (follow the plan of care for your client)

- Use soap sparingly
- Do not give daily tub bath or shower unless care plan indicates to do so
- Apply moisturizing creams or lotions to skin after bathing
- *Do not put oils in bathtub due to risk of falls*
- Avoid alcohol based products, as they tend to dry the skin
- File brittle fingernails as needed, apply lotion to soften nails
- Do not cut or file toenails, notify your supervisor, a podiatrist (foot doctor) may need to be contacted