

Should you use antibiotic creams on your skin?

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As winter winds leave your skin dry, cracked and prone to cuts and

bleeding, a skin expert says you should resist the urge to use antibiotic creams or ointments.

While it might seem sensible to use antibiotic topicals to combat germs and prevent [infection](#) with [cuts](#), they can irritate your [skin](#) even more and cause a painful and/or itchy rash called [contact dermatitis](#), dermatologist Dr. Marcelyn Coley warned.

"In addition to causing irritation and a rash, the widespread use of [antibiotics](#)—including in instances when they aren't needed—has contributed to a major public health challenge known as [antibiotic resistance](#)," Coley said in an American Academy of Dermatology news release.

"[Antibiotic resistance](#) occurs when germs, such as bacteria, develop the ability to survive the drugs designed to kill them," she explained. "That means the germs continue to grow. This makes infections caused by antibiotic-resistant germs difficult, and sometimes impossible, to treat."

Most minor cuts and wounds, and even surgical [wounds](#), do not require antibiotics, Coley said.

The only time antibiotics are typically needed is when there is an infection. Signs of infection include: pus, pain, yellow crusts, red or purple skin, reddish streaks, swelling or warmth, feeling very hot or cold, or fever.

If your wound doesn't have any signs of an infection, skip the antibiotics and take the following steps instead, Coley advised:

- Keep your skin injury clean. Wash your hands before touching the wound, and gently wash the wound daily with mild soap and water to keep out germs. As long as the wound is cleaned daily,

an antibiotic ointment isn't needed.

- Apply plain petroleum jelly to keep the wound moist. Use petroleum jelly from a tube instead of a jar to prevent spreading dirt and bacteria.
- Keep your wound covered with an adhesive bandage. For large scrapes, sores or burns, hydrogel or silicone gel sheets may be better.

"According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than half of all antibiotics used in the U.S. are not needed," Coley said. "If you injure your skin and have questions about how to treat it, talk to a board-certified dermatologist."

More information: For more on treating common household injuries, see the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#).

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