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GOOD FOR LIFE.**The skin: under-recognized for its attributes,
under-treated for ailments**by Susan Budig
Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder
Originally posted 11/19/2008

It's the barometer of our internal health. Covering 20 square feet and functioning as protector, regulator, sex organ, and raincoat, our skin deserves more respect than the dismissive quote by Richard Armour who says, "Beauty is only skin deep, and the world is full of thin-skinned people."

Dr. Charles Crutchfield
Credit: Crutchfield

Dermatology

The top layer of our skin, also known as the stratum corneum, really is thin — thinner than the plastic wrap used in your kitchen. And it's this layer, says Dr. Charles Crutchfield, dermatologist in Eagan, that takes a lot of abuse.

"People tend to overdo it; they scrub and use things that are too harsh on their skin. So loofah brushes, buff puffs [and] things like that are way too harsh. And [many people] use real harsh soaps thinking it will help them, but all they need is something gentle like Dove," says Crutchfield.

Part of the problem, says Aundria Morgan, prevention specialist at St. Stephen's Human Services in Minneapolis, is a lack of selection. "Here [in Minnesota] I just don't find a lot of [skin products]. The selection is poor," laments Morgan. "We need these people who develop the products to make stuff for people who aren't White," she insists.

Because of the limited selection of skin products for Black skin, some people turn to their kitchen cupboards. New Yorker Jacki Thompson, mother to Trevel, admits, "In the winter, we use olive oil right from the bottle." Linda Hammersten, who lives in St. Louis Park, says about her three nephews, now grown, "They would talk about their skin getting chalky, particularly in the dry air of Minnesota winters. They kept baby oil on hand to cure the problem."

Crutchfield identifies the lack of moisturizer as the number-one problem for Black-skinned people. "It's so dry, put on lotion twice a day," suggests Crutchfield.

While exceptionally dry skin is problematic for people of color, there are grave skin concerns that sometimes are overlooked in the Black community. Says Crutchfield, who's Black, "I think, no matter what color your skin is, anyone can get skin cancer. In fact, my grandfather, who's African American, had skin cancer."

Because there is a perception that Blacks won't get skin cancer, detection is delayed and the rate of fatal cancer increases. Thompson says of her son, "Trevel does burn, but it isn't as noticeable." Because the burn is less visible, the damage is overlooked, but that compounds the problem.

Crutchfield uses a take-off on a childhood fictional character to encourage his clients to pay attention to their skin. "See Spot, See Spot change, then see a dermatologist," he quips. While his humorous saying can be a helpful guide toward knowing what to look for regarding signs of cancer, finding a dermatologist can be equally daunting.

"My dermatologist told me that I'm the first person of color she's ever seen [in her practice]," says Morgan. "That's disappointing to me."

When Morgan developed vitiligo, she started to look for a doctor. "I went online and searched for a dermatologist based on my insurance plan and also who was accessible by public transportation," says Morgan. What she discovered was disillusioning. When a doctor looked at her vitiligo, a chronic skin disease that causes loss of pigment resulting in irregular pale patches of skin, the response was, "Oh, there's really nothing we can do," says Morgan.

"I don't think they look at [vitiligo] as a real issue. My experience with dermatologists was annoying, frustrating, and insulting," grieves Morgan.

Such sentiments frustrate doctors like Crutchfield as well. He wants to encourage his patients: "The most important message I'd like to get out to patients is that there are great skin treatments, many very new, so if you do have a problem with your skin, you don't have to live with it."

Too bad his Eagan office takes three buses and two hours for Morgan to reach, each way.

For more information on Dr. Charles Crutchfield, go to www.crutchfielddermatology.com or call 651...Susan Budig welcomes reader responses to tomandsusan@juno.com.[Make a Comment](#) [Email This Story to a Friend](#)[Back to Previous Page](#)**Are you ready to
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