SYMPTOM

Wrinkles

Wrinkles are lines, folds, or creases that develop in the skin.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Fine lines or deeper creases, usually without pain

WHERE IT IS FELT
Face, neck, hands, and other sun-exposed skin

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Natural aging, sun exposure, repeated facial expressions

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Sudden change with swelling, blistering, severe pain, or fever

USUALLY LASTS
Long-term, often deepening gradually with age and sun exposure

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Persistent itching, pain, inflammation, or concern about appearance

Overview

Wrinkles are lines, folds, or creases in the skin. They are a normal part of aging and are not a disease by themselves.

Fine lines often appear first around the eyes, mouth, and forehead. Deeper folds may develop later, especially in areas exposed to sunlight. Some wrinkles show mainly when you smile or frown. Others remain visible when your face is relaxed.

Wrinkles usually develop slowly. Sun exposure, smoking, skin dryness, and repeated facial movements can make them appear earlier or become more noticeable.

A sudden skin change is less likely to be an ordinary wrinkle. It may need medical attention if it comes with pain, swelling, blistering, weakness, or other symptoms.

What it may feel or look like

Wrinkles are usually painless. They may appear as:

Wrinkles commonly affect the forehead, corners of the eyes, area around the mouth, neck, upper chest, forearms, and backs of the hands.

Sun-damaged skin may also have uneven colour, rough patches, visible small blood vessels, or areas that bruise easily. A new lump, sore, scaly patch, or changing pigmented spot should not be assumed to be a wrinkle.

- Fine, shallow lines
- Deeper grooves or folds
- Creases that appear with facial expressions
- Lines that remain while the face is relaxed
- Thin, dry, or less elastic skin around the creases

Common causes

Natural aging is the main cause. With time, skin makes less collagen and elastin. Collagen gives skin strength, while elastin helps it return to shape. The layer of fat beneath the skin also changes, and the skin becomes thinner and drier.

Sun exposure speeds up these changes. Ultraviolet, or UV, radiation damages collagen and other supporting structures in the skin. This is called photoaging. It is often most noticeable on the face, neck, chest, and hands.

Repeated facial expressions can create lines where the skin folds during smiling, squinting, frowning, or raising the eyebrows. These are sometimes called expression lines.

Smoking contributes to premature skin aging by exposing the skin to harmful chemicals and reducing its normal repair processes. Repeated pursing of the lips may also deepen lines around the mouth.

Dry skin does not usually cause permanent wrinkles, but it can make fine lines look more noticeable. Weight loss may also reveal looser skin or deepen facial folds.

Less commonly, unusually loose or wrinkled skin can occur with an inherited connective tissue condition. These conditions usually cause other signs and are not the usual explanation for ordinary facial lines.

When to seek medical care

Wrinkles that develop gradually without other symptoms do not usually need medical care. You can book a routine appointment if the changes are causing distress, if you want advice about treatment, or if the skin is persistently itchy, painful, red, or inflamed.

Arrange prompt medical assessment for a new skin area that:

Seek emergency help if a sudden change in facial appearance comes with facial drooping, arm weakness, trouble speaking, severe breathing difficulty, or swelling of the lips or tongue. These are not features of ordinary wrinkles.

- Bleeds repeatedly or does not heal
- Forms a growing lump or persistent scaly patch
- Changes colour, shape, or size
- Becomes suddenly swollen, blistered, hot, or very painful
- Appears with fever or signs of infection

How the cause is found

Most wrinkles can be understood from their appearance and how gradually they developed. A healthcare professional may ask about sun exposure, smoking, skin-care products, medicines, recent weight changes, and other symptoms.

They may examine the texture, colour, and elasticity of your skin. They will also look for changes that could represent sun damage or another skin condition.

Blood tests, scans, and skin samples are not usually needed for ordinary wrinkles. Further testing may be considered when skin changes are sudden, unusual for your age, widespread, or accompanied by symptoms elsewhere in the body.

Treatment and self-care

Wrinkles do not require treatment unless you want to reduce their appearance or address damaged skin.

A moisturiser can temporarily soften fine lines by increasing water in the outer skin layer. Choose a gentle product if your skin is dry or sensitive.

Protecting your skin from UV radiation can help limit further photoaging. Use shade and protective clothing, and apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher to exposed skin. Avoid tanning beds.

Retinoids are vitamin A-related products that can improve some fine wrinkles over time. Prescription tretinoin has stronger evidence than many over-the-counter products, but it can cause dryness, peeling, redness, and irritation. Start only with appropriate professional or

product guidance. Ask a clinician before using a retinoid if you are pregnant, trying to become pregnant, or breastfeeding.

Procedures such as botulinum toxin injections, fillers, chemical peels, laser treatment, and microneedling may reduce certain wrinkles. Results and risks differ. Possible problems include infection, scarring, pigment changes, burns, or injury from an incorrectly placed filler. Choose a suitably trained and licensed healthcare professional who can assess your skin and explain realistic outcomes.

What to expect

Wrinkles generally remain and slowly become more noticeable with age. Moisturisers may soften their appearance, while sun protection can help prevent avoidable worsening.

Treatments can reduce some lines, but they do not stop aging. Results may be partial or temporary, and deeper folds often respond differently from fine surface lines.

Changes caused by irritation or dryness may improve once the trigger is removed and the skin barrier recovers.

Common questions

Can drinking more water remove wrinkles?

Normal hydration supports general health, but drinking extra water has not been shown to remove established wrinkles. Dehydration can make skin look drier or less full temporarily.

Are wrinkles always caused by sun exposure?

No. Natural aging and facial movement also play important roles. Sun exposure can make wrinkles appear earlier and deepen more quickly.

Do anti-wrinkle creams work?

Moisturisers can make fine lines look softer for a while. Some retinoid products can improve fine wrinkles with regular use, but results take time and irritation is common. Claims for other ingredients vary, and cosmetic products do not produce the same results as procedures.

Can wrinkles be prevented completely?

No. Skin changes are a normal part of aging. Sun protection, avoiding smoking, and using gentle skin care may reduce premature changes, but they cannot prevent all wrinkles.

Should a new line or mark be checked?

Consider an appointment if it appeared suddenly, looks unlike your other lines, or is associated with bleeding, scaling, pain, itching, or a change in colour. A clinician can check whether it is a wrinkle or another type of skin change.

Sources

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