

HOW TO BEST MANAGE CHAPPED LIPS

by Dr. Chris G. Adigun

As we enter winter, your lips can become dry and scaly and may even split and become sore. This is often due to the drop in humidity that accompanies cooler temperatures, along with dry heat indoors. Also, cold season worsens conditions for lips as congestion leads to mouth-breathing, which also dries the lips.

There are some great remedies for this potentially painful nuisance. Equally important, there are things to avoid.

Although it may feel soothing in the short term, licking your chapped lips actually worsens them. There are enzymes in our saliva that aid in the first steps of digestion. Just as these enzymes help break down food, they can irritate the skin barrier on your lips, causing them to become dry and cracked. This can be a tough habit to break, but it will save your lips in the long run.

Some lip treatments contain cooling agents or state “medicated” on the label. Avoid these products. They often contain menthol, camphor or eucalyptus, all of which can irritate and worsen dry lips. You are better off using bland balms without those “medicated” agents that are actually counterproductive to chapped lips.

One of the top triggers of dry lips is dry air. Using a humidifier at home can help. Dehydration also worsens dry lips, so drinking plenty of fluids during the day is important. The humidifier also moistens airways and eases congestion — both of which help with cold symptoms that worsen chapped lips.

Chapped lips are best treated with regular applications of moisturizing balms, especially those with emollients that seal in moisture. Petrolatum is an excellent emollient with a smooth and greasy feel. Dimethicone and glycerin are alternatives that also seal off cracks and help heal splits. There are plant-based waxes and oils that also nourish lips and help restore moisture. These include beeswax, shea butter, soybean oil, coconut oil and castor seed oil.

Chapped lips that do not heal or improve with regular moisturization can signal an infection or a more serious problem. Infections that affect the lips include viruses, yeasts and bacteria. Certain skin cancers and precancerous conditions, such as actinic cheilitis, also cause dry, scaly lips that do not heal with regular remedies. See a dermatologist if this occurs.



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