

7 dermatologists' tips for healing dry, chapped lips

While it may seem that dry, cracked lips are something you must live with until spring comes, you can have soft, supple lips year-round. Here's what dermatologists recommend.

1. **Use non-irritating lip balm, lipstick, and other products that you apply to your lips.** Many people mistake discomfort, such as burning, stinging, or tingling, as a sign that the active ingredients in a product are working. That's not what's happening. You're actually irritating your lips, so you want to stop using any product that irritates your lips.

Ingredients to avoid while your lips are chapped: To help chapped lips heal, stop applying lip products that contain any of the following:

- Camphor
- Eucalyptus
- Flavoring: Cinnamon, citrus, mint, and peppermint flavors can be especially irritating to dry, chapped lips
- Fragrance
- Lanolin
- Menthol
- Octinoxate or oxybenzone
- Phenol (or phenyl)
- Propyl gallate
- Salicylic acid

Ingredients that can help heal chapped lips: While some ingredients can irritate dry, cracked lips, others can help them heal. When looking for products to use on your chapped lips, dermatologists recommend ones that contain one or more of the following:

- Castor seed oil
- Ceramides
- Dimethicone
- Hemp seed oil
- Mineral oil
- Petrolatum
- Shea butter
- Sun-protective ingredients, such as titanium oxide or zinc oxide
- White petroleum jelly

It also helps to use products that are **fragrance free** and **hypoallergenic**.

If your lips burn, sting, or feel uncomfortable when you apply a product to your lips, it means you're irritating your lips, so you want to stop using that product.



2. **Apply a non-irritating lip balm (or lip moisturizer) several times a day and before bed.** If your lips are very dry and cracked, try a thick ointment, such as white petroleum jelly. Ointment seals in water longer than waxes or oils.
3. **Slather on a non-irritating lip balm with SPF 30 or higher before going outdoors.** Even in the winter, it's important to protect your lips from the sun. The sun can burn dry, chapped lips more easily, which could trigger cold sores.

To protect dry, chapped lips from the sun, use lip balm that contains offers SPF 30 or higher and one (or both) of these sun-protective ingredients:

- Titanium oxide
- Zinc oxide

While outdoors, generously **apply the lip balm every 2 hours.**

4. **Drink plenty of water.** Chapped lips are dry lips, so you want to stay hydrated.
5. **Stop licking, biting, and picking at your lips.** When lips feel dry, it may feel natural to wet them by licking them, but this can worsen the problem. As saliva evaporates, your lips become drier.

Picking or biting your lips also irritates them, which can prevent healing.

Lip licking can be a hard habit to break. When you catch yourself licking your lips, try applying a non-irritating lip balm instead.



6. **Avoid holding items made of metal with your lips.** Paperclips, jewelry, and other everyday products made of metal can irritate your already sensitive lips.
7. **Plug in a humidifier at home.** A humidifier in your bedroom can be especially helpful, especially if you breathe through your mouth at night.

By following these dermatologists' tips for chapped lips, you should have noticeable improvement in 2 to 3 weeks. To prevent your lips from chapping again, continue applying lip balm whenever it's dry indoors or outside.

When to see a dermatologist?

Most of the time, the above self-care can heal dry, chapped lips in 2 to 3 weeks. If it doesn't, see a board-certified dermatologist.

Your chapped lips could be caused by something aside from dry weather. An allergic reaction, yeast infection, or something more serious can make your lips feel dry and uncomfortable. Actinic cheilitis is a precancerous condition that turns one or both lips dry and scaly. A board-certified dermatologist can diagnose the cause.

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