

Pucker Up!

By Suze Hargraves

Once December rolls around I've got chapped lips and it drives me nuts. I've got drawers, pockets and purses full of every brand of lip balm available. I've dug deep in my pockets for the very expensive stuff and shaken the piggy bank for the cheap stuff. In the end I have enough tubes of goo to wax every floor in America, but I've still got chapped lips. What am I doing wrong? Dermatologists call it "cheilitis". I don't care what it's called but something's gotta give.

Chronically chapped lips can be due to some easily fixable things. If your lips always seemed to be chapped look for some common culprits first:

- Dehydration is the most common cause.
- Propyl gallate or phenyl salicylate (salol) in any lip product or guaiazulene or sodium lauryl sulfate or red dyes in toothpaste, mouthwash or other mouth care products.
- Don't put things like pens and paper clips in your mouth if you have a nickel allergy.
- Citrus fruits in direct contact with lips can cause irritation and drying.
- Picking at or habitually licking or chewing on your lips will cause chapping.
- Skin conditions that cause rashes elsewhere such as eczema or psoriasis can also affect your lips. Do not put the same medicine on your lips that you use on your body unless directed to do so by your healthcare provider.
- Lip products that make your lips feel itchy or dry or cause them to start cracking should be avoided. Many lip products including lipsticks, lip stains and balms can have fragrances, preservatives and coloring that can irritate sensitive lips.

After ruling out the simple things, chronically chapped lips should be addressed by your healthcare provider. There are a variety of conditions and medications that can leave you with chapped lips. Never stop using a medication unless directed to do so by your healthcare team.

To avoid chapped, irritated lips steer clear of products containing parabens, fragrance, glycolic or salicylic acid, oil of cloves (contains eugenol) and lanolin. Stick with products containing glycerin, beeswax, natural oils or good old fashioned petrolatum. Don't forget to protect your lips from sun by choosing lip protection products with an SPF of at least 15 that protects from both UVA and UVB rays. Slather it on and keep doing it. The American Academy of Dermatology reports that there's no truth to the old wives tale that lip balms are addicting. You simply get used to having soft-supple lips and that's a good thing.

Your lips are an indicator of your health just like the rest of your skin. Pay attention to them and protect them. Keep that perfect pucker year round.

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