



YOU AND YOUR DERM:

**How to get the most out of your
dermatology appointment**



Canadian Skin Patient Alliance
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patients en dermatologie

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By Dr. Harry Liu, Dr. Valerie C. Doyon, Dr. Owen Dan Luo & Yvonne Deng

There are visible and invisible aspects of skin, hair, and nail conditions. The purpose of this resource is to help you prepare for your upcoming appointment and to support you in building a stronger patient-physician relationship with your dermatologist. We want to help you understand what to expect during your visit to the clinic, as well as what you should know so that you can get the most out of your dermatology appointment. A typical day in a dermatology clinic can be fast-paced. Because there are more patients to see

than dermatologists available, you may notice that your appointment will move quickly to ensure that all patients can be seen. This doesn't have to mean that your experience at the clinic will be overwhelming. You can ensure that you get the most out of your time with your dermatologist by preparing yourself for a productive encounter, which can include gathering personal information about your condition and setting a positive and realistic mindset. It will help you form an effective team with your dermatologist, so you can gain a better understanding of your medical concerns and improve your overall health and quality of life. We created this workbook to help you achieve this goal.

PART 1: BUILDING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR DERMATOLOGIST

Establishing a positive patient-physician relationship is the cornerstone of quality healthcare and fulfilling patient experiences. During your first visit with a dermatologist, you may feel anxious and vulnerable, and it can be difficult to share personal information that you may not have even shared with friends and family members yet. Your relationship with your dermatologist can help you feel more comfortable with asking questions and participating in conversations. It can become an important and meaningful component of your wellness and health journey.

WAYS TO BUILD A STRONG PATIENT-PHYSICIAN RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR DERMATOLOGIST:

1. Be your own advocate.

Have a detailed understanding of your experiences with your condition: knowing how it has changed, what medications you are taking, and how it has impacted you personally will allow you to take on an active role in helping your dermatologist determine the diagnosis and create a treatment plan that works for you.

2. Set your expectations for your visit.

Identifying positive and realistic expectations for what you would like to achieve from your visit is crucial. Treatments need time and consistency to work and setting practical timelines can encourage you to follow your own care plan.

3. Bring a companion for support.

It can be daunting and a lot of work to go through this process alone, so ask the clinic if you can bring someone with you to your appointment. A close friend or family member may even help you remember details of your condition and provide a different perspective about an issue you are concerned about.

4. Be honest with your physician.

It is normal to feel embarrassed or sensitive about sharing personal information, especially about your body and a condition that has impacted your life. Physicians often ask the same questions to many patients and want to know what is going on for you. They have a duty to respect your confidentiality. Information about your progress, lifestyle, and feelings contribute to your overall care, including the advice and treatment plan you receive, so it is important to be truthful and open in your responses.

5. Participate in making decisions about your health.

Although your doctor is the one with medical expertise and will guide you through the next steps, you know your own body and health the best. Treatment plans only work when they make sense to you and you can follow them. When you work together with your dermatologist to create a treatment plan that reflects your goals, you will feel more empowered to follow your own care plan.



**FOR YOUR INTEREST:****WHAT ELEMENTS MAKE UP THE PATIENT-PHYSICIAN RELATIONSHIP?****1. Trust.**

Trust with your doctor is built on open communication through active listening, empathy, and nonverbal cues (e.g., body language). It allows both you and your doctor to work together to address concerns early on and to be included in the decision-making process.

2. Mutual Knowledge.

A doctor's understanding of you as a person and a patient, in addition to how well you know your doctor, is important in strengthening the relationship. As doctors get to know you and your condition on a deeper level and better understand your concerns and expectations, you should feel more understood and seen as a person, not just defined by your disease.

3. Regard.

How you feel towards your doctor, and how you think your doctor feels about you, in terms of comfort and liking, is reflected by the quality of care and respect in the relationship. Physicians who are associated with feelings of warmth, friendliness, and caring toward their patients have been shown to improve patient satisfaction and foster a sense of camaraderie.

4. Support and Connection.

Long-term care and continued support help you feel that your physician is committed to your care. You want to feel that your doctor is "on your side", and often this feeling can impact how likely you will follow their treatment plan and your willingness to ask questions and attend follow-up visits.

PART 2: PREPARATION FOR YOUR DERMATOLOGY APPOINTMENT

LOGISTICS

Determine whether your appointment will be in-person or virtual (telephone or online video platform).

In-person:

- Plan how you will get to the clinic.
- If you are driving, find parking options in advance to reduce your stress on appointment day (you can also phone the office in advance and ask about parking).
- Please arrive at your appointment on time (some dermatologists see several patients per hour, so they might not be able to fit you in on the same day if you are late).

Virtual:

- Telephone: make sure they have the right phone number to reach you and find a quiet location with stable connection. Some doctors call from a hidden number (no caller ID) so it can be helpful to know whether the call will come from a private number.
- Online video platform: in addition to a stable internet connection, ensure your environment has good lighting because the dermatologists may ask you to show them your skin.

CHECKLIST

I know my appointment type (in-person vs. virtual)

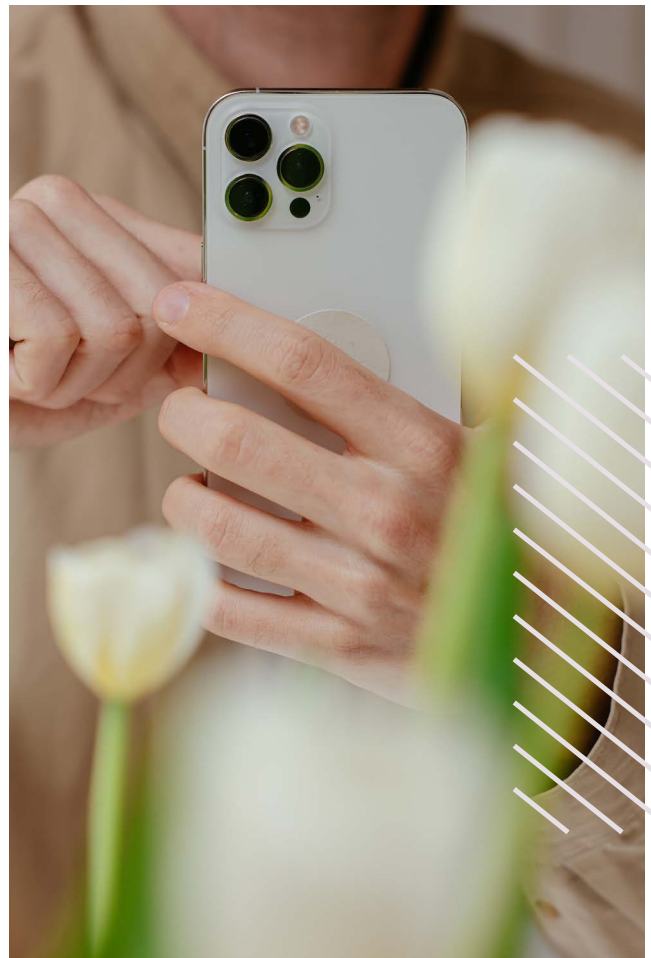
I have a travel plan to get to the clinic and know where to park if driving

BE PREPARED TO TALK ABOUT YOUR SKIN CONCERN

To get the best treatment for your skin, you can work together with the dermatologist and help them provide the best care for you. Dermatologists diagnose various medical conditions of skin, hair, and nails by examining your skin and asking you relevant questions. Knowing details about your own skin concern can ensure that you are prepared to share relevant information with your dermatologist at your appointment, like when the rash started, how it has changed over time, does it cause any symptoms like itch or pain, as well as any photos you have taken that show these changes. Here are some ways to keep track of the details you noticed about your skin, hair, and nails so that you can be ready to share them with your dermatologist:

Take photos

- If you have a device that can take photos, good photos are valuable information you can have ready to share with your dermatologist, especially if your condition is fluctuating.
- Ensure that the photos are easily accessible. Consider flagging/bookmarking those photos or creating a virtual photo album dedicated to your skin condition so that you can easily show them to your dermatologist. For non-smartphone users, you may need to keep track of when the photos were taken.
- If possible, take photos to document if/how your rash changes, and pay particular attention if there is:
 - Bleeding
 - Colour changes
 - Pus filled spots
 - Blisters
 - Draining
 - Ulceration (development of open sores, called ulcers, due to poor blood flow).
- Here are some tips for taking good clinical photos: https://issuu.com/kelmanonline/docs/canadianskin_spring2022/14.



Track your symptoms

- Dermatology is a visual medical specialty. Looking at the skin, hair, and/or nails is the main way dermatologists make a diagnosis. Your symptoms like itch can be reflected on your skin as well, so don't be alarmed if your dermatologist is able to make a diagnosis without exploring all details of your symptoms.
- If possible, rate the severity of your symptoms out of 10 (with 1 being hardly noticeable and 10 being unbearable). Some tools that you can use to help track your symptoms are a journal, a binder, or an app on your phone.
- Timeline
 - Document the timeline of your skin concerns including when you first noticed them and how they have changed over time.
- If relevant, document things you or your skin may have come in contact with that may be relevant to your skin concerns.
 - Contact exposures: cosmetics/fragrances, chemicals at work and at home, contact with anyone with similar skin symptoms.
 - Travel and outdoor exposure: insect bites, sun exposure, use of sunscreen, tanning bed use, recent travel, seasonal variation in your skin condition.
 - Animal exposure: new pets, exposure to farm/exotic animals.
- Document how your quality of life has been impacted by your skin conditions.
 - How are your sleep, relationships, school/work, energy levels, social/leisure activities, and ability to complete household activities/chores impacted?
 - During your visit, your dermatologist may ask you to fill out a questionnaire to learn about the impact of your skin on your quality of life called the Dermatology Life Quality Index (DLQI) – this is not a routine practice but more likely to happen if your doctor suspects

Symptoms to pay attention to are:

- **Itch, skin pain**
- **Other symptoms: bleeding, colour changes, burning, stinging, or numbness**
- **Symptoms beyond your skin: joint issues, fever, feeling unwell, fatigue, unintentional weight changes, drenching night sweats**

that you might have a chronic or long-term condition like psoriasis, eczema (atopic dermatitis), or alopecia.

- Document what treatments have been tried (if any).
 - Write down the names of the cream, ointments, and/or oral medications including the ones being prescribed or over the counter. Alternatively, bring them to your appointment or add photos of them to your dedicated virtual photo album.
 - Note how long they have been tried for, if you noticed any benefits or any side effects. This information is very important to help your dermatologist make the correct diagnosis and decide on the optimal treatment options for you.
 - Document if any other dermatologists or doctors have seen you for the same condition. If so, what did they tell you during those previous consultations?

CHECKLIST

If needed, I have photos taken and readily accessible of my skin concern

I know my symptoms and their severity well for my skin concern

I know how the skin concern has impacted my quality of life

I know or have written down the names of all the treatments that have been tried for my skin concern. I will bring all treatments to my appointment if needed



KNOW YOUR GENERAL HEALTH WELL

Skin concerns can be linked to what is happening inside your body. They may be linked to the other medical conditions that you have or medications you were taking. To help your dermatologist best investigate your skin concerns and make appropriate connections to any underlying health issues you may have, it is important you know your general health well. The easiest way is to write them down on a piece of paper and bring them to your doctor's appointment. Some people keep them in their wallet, and some take photos of it and save it on their phone. Essentially, however is easiest for you to keep and retrieve the information when needed. Some offices may send out forms for you to fill out before your appointment, and some may have you fill out a form on relevant conditions on the day of visit before seeing your dermatologist.

Your other medical conditions

- All elements of your medical history are important, but pay particular attention and share with your dermatologist if you have any of the following:
 - Previous diagnoses of skin cancer (what kind of skin cancer, when you were diagnosed, location on your body, and treatment).
 - Previous diagnoses of any other skin conditions (what kind of skin condition, when you were diagnosed, location on your body, and treatment).
 - History of eczema, asthma, and allergic rhinitis
 - You are pregnant, have a known bleeding disorder, or require prophylactic antibiotics for surgery.
 - Other: diabetes, inflammatory bowel diseases, hepatitis or any liver conditions, arthritis, kidney/heart/liver transplant, and other medical diseases requiring oral steroids or immunosuppression medications.

Your medications

- Similar to medications you use for your skin concerns, keep a written list of all your other prescribed and over the counter medications and supplements. Alternatively, you can bring

them to your appointment or add photos of them to your dedicated virtual photo album.

- If possible, include the reason why these medications were prescribed and approximately how long you have been taking each of them (or make sure your caregivers know). Sometimes this may be challenging to know especially if you are taking multiple medications, but try your best.

Your family history

- Ask if anyone in your family has similar skin concerns or any known skin, autoimmune, or rheumatologic conditions as well as cancer.
- Pay attention to your first-degree relatives, i.e., parents, siblings, and children.

Know your weight in kilograms

- Sometimes, the dosing of your medication depends on your weight and the dosing is calculated based on your weight in kilograms (NOT pounds). If you're comfortable knowing your weight before the appointment, having the information ready can help you to make the most of your time with your dermatologist.

Be aware of your health insurance plan (at least the name, e.g., Pacific Blue Cross, RAMQ) and if your partner or family has medication coverage if you don't have a health insurance plan. This may impact what treatments your dermatologist prescribes for you. If you aren't sure about what medication coverage you have or might be eligible for, you can use our prescription drug coverage finder, *Is My Prescription Covered?* to learn more: <https://www.canadianskin.ca/is-my-prescription-covered>.

CHECKLIST

I know what other medical conditions I have

I know or have written down the names of all the other medications (including prescribed, over the counter and herbal medications/remedies) I am taking. I will bring all treatments to my appointment or a good quality photo of them if I couldn't recall the name

I know if my parents, siblings, or children have similar skin concerns, known skin, autoimmune, or rheumatologic conditions like arthritis, as well as cancer

I know my weight in kilograms (if I'm comfortable knowing it)

I know what insurance plan I have for medication coverage

PART 3: YOUR DERMATOLOGY APPOINTMENT

Visiting the dermatologist can be stressful, especially if you have waited a long time for the appointment. Here's how to make the most of your dermatology appointment.

LOGISTICS

- Leave yourself 15 minutes to park and find the office, especially if your appointment is at a hospital. Dermatologists manage unforeseen events such as doing multiple skin biopsies for spotted skin cancers, so please be understanding if your dermatologist is running late.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes that can be easily removed. You may be asked to change into a gown if a full body skin examination is needed.
- Please refrain from wearing makeup over the affected areas because your dermatologist needs to examine your bare skin to make the most accurate diagnosis.
- Before seeing your dermatologist, you may be asked to fill out a form about your skin concern, medical history, current medications, and allergies.

CHECKLIST

I will try to arrive 15 minutes early to find the dermatology office

I am wearing loose-fitting clothes that can be easily removed to expose my rash or get changed into a gown

I am not wearing makeup over the affected areas



QUESTIONS YOUR DERMATOLOGIST MAY ASK YOU

Onset	How long have you had this condition?
Triggers	What worsens your skin? Does anything make it better?
Associated Symptoms	Is it itchy? Does it hurt or burn? Does it bleed or weep fluid?
Time Context	Am I seeing you on a “good” or “bad” day for your skin?
Previous Treatments	What have you tried in the past? Did you stop the treatment because it didn’t work, due to side effects, or for another reason?
Current Treatments	What topical, oral, injection, and/or light therapies are you using? (see tips below)
Severity and Impact	How much does it bother you, including impact on your quality of life?
General Medical History	Besides the skin conditions, what other medical conditions do you have (e.g., diabetes)? What medications are you taking? Do you have any allergies?
Lifestyle and Circumstances	Do you have prescription drug coverage through an insurance company? Do you smoke, drink alcohol, or use other drugs? Do you have family or emotional supports? What is your living situation?



Tips for communicating your treatment regimens:

- Include all forms of treatment: creams, shampoos, pills, injections, and phototherapy. If unsure, bring everything you have tried to the clinic.
- Know the exact name of your medicine (either generic or brand name) or bring the medications or a good quality photo with you – you can often ask for a list of your medications from your pharmacist.
- Be ready to list your non-prescription treatments, such as which moisturizer you are using and its brand name. Again, it's a good idea to bring them in if you are not sure.
- Mention supplements and naturopathic remedies, as these may interact with other treatments or make you prone to bleeding during procedures.
- Share how and where you are applying your creams and how much, for example, "I use a pea-sized amount on my face."
- Share how often you use the medicine: e.g., every night, twice daily, only during flares? Don't be shy to tell them how often you forget to use it, as it will help your dermatologists decide what treatment would be the most appropriate
- Please bring your medicines or a good quality photo of them with you to the appointment. This allows your dermatologist to see how much you have used.



PHYSICAL EXAMINATION YOUR DERMATOLOGIST MAY PERFORM

Some patients feel embarrassed or nervous about having their skin examined. If so, let your dermatologist know and they will take extra steps to make you comfortable. Keep in mind that dermatologists look at skin problems all day long and the goal is to make the right diagnosis and prescribe the right treatment so your skin condition can improve. Your dermatologist should inspect your skin while keeping other areas covered. If you ever feel uncomfortable, please speak up and communicate with them.

Even if your skin is only affected in one area, your dermatologist may have to look at other parts of the body, including your hair, nails, or mouth to look for clues to make the right diagnosis. Besides looking at your skin, your dermatologist may also need to feel the texture of your skin with their fingers.

Tips:

- There is no need to shave for your appointment
- Bring photos of when your skin initially broke out or was at its worst and make sure they are quickly accessible.
- For many conditions, the diagnosis and assessment are mostly made visually, so don't fret if your dermatologist seems more focused on examining your skin than asking questions.
- Specific communities and cultures may have unique concerns surrounding a visit to the dermatologist. The CSPA has developed a few resources to help navigate dermatology for different groups, including Muslim patients and Black and Brown communities. To explore these resources and learn more about navigating these appointments, visit: <https://www.canadianskin.ca/education/communities-and-cultures>.



OTHER TESTS OR TOOLS YOUR DERMATOLOGIST MAY PERFORM OR USE

- **Dermatoscope:** This is a handheld magnifying glass-like tool with special lighting that allows your dermatologist to see tiny details that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Your dermatologist may use this device to take a closer look at your skin, hair, or nails.
- **Skin Swab/Scraping:** Your dermatologist may swab using a cotton tip or gently scrape the surface of your affected skin with a blade to test if it is infected with bacteria, fungus, or mites.
- **Biopsy:** To confirm the diagnosis, your dermatologist may take a small sample of your skin (usually less than the size of a pencil eraser) and send it for analysis under the microscope by a pathologist. This is a minor 5-to-10-minute office procedure that is often completed on the day of your appointment. This involves injecting some freezing to numb the area, cutting out a small bit of skin, and then placing one or two stitches to close the skin, if necessary.
- **Wood's Lamp:** This is a specialized ultraviolet (UV) light device that your dermatologist may use to examine lighter skin patches of skin for conditions such as vitiligo. The special light increases the contrast of depigmented skin (skin that has stopped producing melanin) from normal skin, so don't be alarmed by the appearance of your skin under the light.
- **Blood/Urine Tests:** Your dermatologist may ask you to go to a lab to give a blood or urine sample. Often, they are to check for possible systemic conditions related to your skin, as well as to monitor the possible side effects from oral medication.



Dermatoscope



Skin biopsy

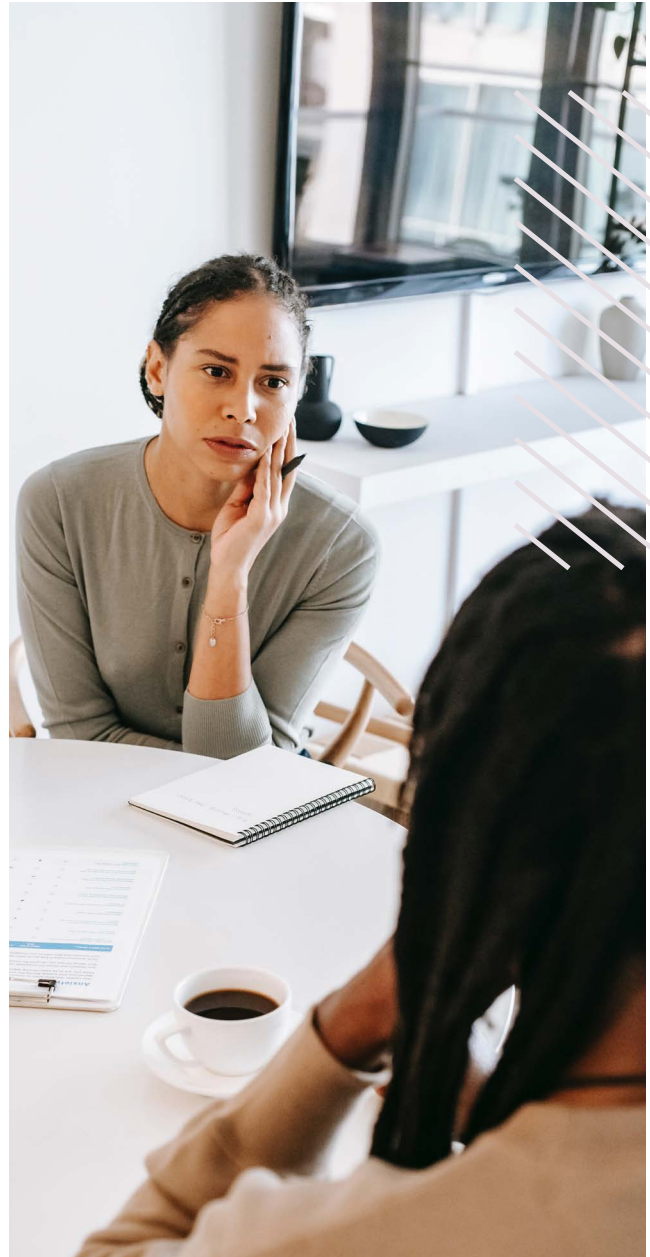


Wood's lamp

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK YOUR DERMATOLOGIST

Hopefully your dermatologist will have addressed the questions listed below. If not, please feel free to ask them. There are over 3,000 dermatologic conditions that dermatologists have to manage. Some conditions are less studied, and dermatologists may not have answers to all your questions.

- For your condition, know the following:
 - What is the name of my condition?
 - Is it chronic or will it resolve over time? If so, how long?
 - What should I do if I have a flare?
- For your treatment, know the following:
 - How often should I use it? For how long should I use it?
 - For topical treatment, how much you should apply?
 - How much improvement can I expect? How long will it take to kick in?
 - How expensive is it? Will my insurance cover this medication? There are many different insurance plans for medication coverage, so you may need to check with your pharmacist regarding specific pricing for your plan
 - What common side effects I should watch out for?



PART 4: WHAT TO DO AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT

- Appointment
 - Know if you need a follow up appointment with your dermatologist, and if so, when. Also, know if your appointment is in-person or virtual (telephone call or video conference). If in person, make the appointment with the office staff before you leave.
 - Clarify if you will need a new referral from your family doctor to be seen next time.
- If you have further questions after your appointment:
 - Did you remember something you wanted to ask about your medication after you left your appointment? For medication questions, your pharmacist is a great place to start. Sometimes, your pharmacist may ask you to apply a thin layer of topical corticosteroids to your rash and talk to you about the side effects of skin atrophy. Know that the use of topical corticosteroids under the guidance of dermatologists is very safe. If you have concerns, discuss with your dermatologist.
 - For questions about biologic medications, such as cost coverage and support with the injection, you could reach out to your local coordinator from the drug manufacturer (patient support program).
 - For other questions, write them down and ask your dermatologist at the next appointment. If urgent, don't be afraid to contact the office of your dermatologist.

USING YOUR MEDICATIONS

- Medications
 - If you receive a prescription, ensure you understand how much and how frequently to use it – if you're not sure, ask your pharmacist or call your dermatologist's office to ask.
 - If you will run out soon, ask for a prescription renewal during your appointment. Pay attention to how many refills you have.
 - Educate yourself on the type of medicine you are given. You might be given different medications for different places on your body – some for tougher areas like the palms of your hands, and some for more sensitive areas like your face or genital area. Understand which topical treatment goes on which body part, as instructed by your dermatologist.
 - Be aware if your medicine suppresses your immune system or causes your skin to be sensitive to the sun and ask about the precautions you can take to keep yourself safe.
- If you are wondering about the cost, you can:
 1. Ask your pharmacist about the medication.
 2. Talk to your dermatologist about it. Your dermatologist can sometimes request special authority from your insurance provider to get the medication covered if certain criteria are met. If medication cost is an issue, make sure to bring it up with your dermatologist. If cost is not an issue, also mention this because there may be more options for you to pick from.
 3. Browse www.drugsearch.ca to look up the prices (for British Columbia residents).
 4. Use [Is My Prescription Covered?](#), CSPA's prescription drug coverage finder to learn whether or not your prescription can be covered by a public plan, and if not, what private options you may be eligible for so that you can have drug coverage.



TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

- Progress
 - Notice how much your condition responds to treatment.
 - If needed, document your condition with regular photographs taken in the same position and lighting (taking them at the same time of day in the same location can help). We tend to pay more attention to what we would still like to change about ourselves than how far we've come or how much something has improved. Photographs may give you a more accurate and objective idea of how much your condition has improved.
 - Score your symptoms (such as itch) out of 10 and use a logbook to keep track over time.
- Emergencies
 - If your condition suddenly flares, don't hesitate to call the dermatologist's office to try to rebook ahead of your next appointment.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT: HOW TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WITH THE SAME CONDITIONS

- Find patient support groups to get more information regarding the nature of your condition, treatment, and even connect with patients sharing the same conditions as you: CSPA has a network of patient groups and organizations, called Affiliate Members, that support people impacted by specific conditions that affect the skin, hair and nails. You can visit our website (<https://canadianskin.ca/about-us/affiliate-members>) to view the list of patient groups and filter to search for organizations that have support groups so that you can continue to build your circle of support.



SEEK CREDIBLE INFORMATION AND AVOID MISINFORMATION

Now, your dermatologist has made a diagnosis of your skin condition. You may be interested to seek further information online to learn more about your condition.

The internet has lots of valuable information, but it also has dangerous misinformation. With the growing reach of social media like Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, and Twitter, people are flooded with information from different resources, some of which may not be reliable. Tips for you to get the most scientifically accurate information:

- Your dermatologist is the most valuable information source for your unique condition and circumstances. The same skin condition can play out differently in different people. Your dermatologist has gone through your medical history, and they know you best. If you have any questions, you can always ask them, especially when you have read conflicting information. They will also have access to resources to find the answers for you if needed.
- The CSPA's website (canadianskin.ca) and social media channels (@CanadianSkin) have reliable information that has been reviewed by medical experts that you may find helpful.
- CSPA's [Affiliate Members](#) have a relationship with a relevant medical expert and their websites may have more in-depth information about your condition.
- Board-certified dermatologists have gone through years of professional training to be skin experts. Some are active on various social media platforms, and you can follow their accounts to receive valuable information about your skin condition(s). They have designated titles of FRCPC (Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Canada) or FAAD (Fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology) after their names. These professional designations confirm that you are reading content from a qualified dermatologist, a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating the skin, hair, and nails. They have completed residency training in dermatology and passed rigorous Canadian or American board exams.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Harry Liu is a senior dermatology resident at the University of British Columbia. His special interests include atopic dermatitis, patient education, skin of colour, and medical education.

Dr. Valerie C. Doyon is a first-year dermatology resident at l'Université de Montréal with a passion for medical education, teledermatology, and rural medicine.

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Yvonne Deng is a senior medical student at the University of British Columbia with an interest in health communication, global health, and advocacy work for underserved populations.



YOUR DERMATOLOGY APPOINTMENT CHECKLIST

I know my appointment type (in-person vs. virtual)

I have a travel plan to get to the clinic and know where to park if driving

If needed, I have photos taken and readily accessible of my skin concern

I know my symptoms and their severity well for my skin concern

I know how the skin concern has impacted my quality of life

I know or have written down the names of all the treatments that have been tried for my skin concern. I will bring all treatments to my appointment if needed

I know what other medical conditions I have

I know or have written down the names of all the other medications (including prescribed, over the counter and herbal medications/remedies) I am taking. I will bring all treatments to my appointment or a good quality photo of them if I couldn't recall the name

I know if my parents, siblings, or children have similar skin concerns, known skin, autoimmune, or rheumatologic conditions like arthritis, as well as cancer

I know my weight in kilograms (if I'm comfortable knowing it)

I know what insurance plan I have for medication coverage

I will try to arrive 15 minutes early to find the dermatology office

I am wearing loose-fitting clothes that can be easily removed to expose my rash or get changed into a gown

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