

# ask Jason

Dr. Jason Karlawish deals with medical issues facing you and your loved ones



**Good reasons to stay fit and active whatever your age, knowing when dry skin could be a problem and a heated debate about sky-high room temperatures.**

**Q** I was a nurse, so I had an active job, but I never exercised outside of work. I retired last year and joined a gym for the first time and now you can't stop me! I do a step or spinning class almost every day and feel great, but my daughter says I'm too old (at 66) to do so much. Could I be at risk?  
*Dana S., San Diego, California*

**A** At risk of what? Living a longer and healthier life? People who haven't exercised for a long time are always advised to have a basic exam for cardiovascular disease before they start a new program of physical activity. This checks blood pressure and fasting glucose and lipid levels. There are some diseases for which exercise is not recommended, or at least needs to be carefully paced out, but if you've been stepping and spinning happily at this rate for a year, your body appears to have passed the stress test already, so you shouldn't have anything to worry about.

There's good data to show that exercise is beneficial at any age. You're not too old at 66. In fact, you're not too old at 86. You can build muscle mass and improve endurance at any point in your life. The main mistake that people make is not starting an exercise program in a rational and progressive manner: if you haven't done a push-up since college, suddenly hitting the gym and doing 30 with attitude is going to leave you stiff, which will make it hard to continue and probably put you off. It's essential that there's a graded approach.

If your daughter really is worried, you can allay her fears by having the basic

exam. You will be asked to fast from the night before the test, but, once it's done, my advice would be to enjoy breakfast and head for the gym!

**Q** During the winter months my skin, especially on my legs, is really dry. I don't think it's eczema, as it's not itchy, and moisturizing day and night helps, but is there anything else I can do? I'm 56, and it seems to get worse every year.  
*Meryl S., Jenkintown, Pennsylvania*

**A** Dry skin is more common as we age and it is especially a problem in winter months when indoor air is both warm and dry. Not all moisturizers are equal, so it might be worth talking to your doctor or dermatologist about the product you're using. Switching to a skin cream formulated for very dry skin could be the simple solution. Also, limiting the temperature and length of winter showers and baths and protecting your skin from cold winds can also help retain your skin's natural moisturizers.

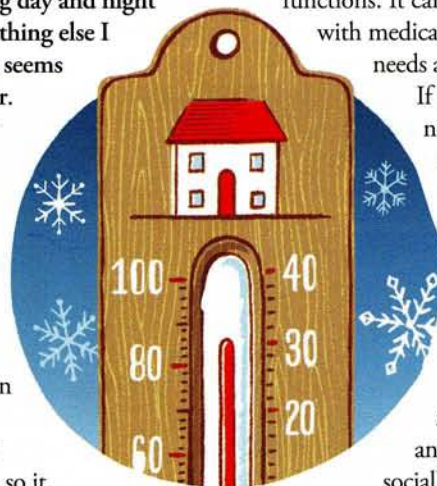
What you perceive as dryness could also be the telltale sign of an underlying vascular problem. Another symptom of a circulation problem is hair loss on the legs. That said, a vascular cause is very unlikely given your relatively young age, but if the problem persists despite your efforts to treat dry skin, have a talk with your doctor so he can exclude an illness as the cause.

**Q** My mother is 92 and hates being cold. She keeps the thermostat in the mid-80s and always wraps up in a blanket. I think this makes her lethargic, and she's not very mobile anyway. Could constant high temperatures be bad for her?  
*Dominic M., Silver Spring, Maryland*

**A** I'm not too worried that high temperatures could be harmful to your mom, but cold intolerance and lethargy are symptoms of hypothyroidism, a condition that slows down the body's functions. It can usually be treated with medication, but your mom needs a blood test to find out.

If the blood test results are normal, don't fret about the temperature your mother prefers. However, her cold intolerance is obviously stopping her from getting out, and this can't be good. It probably means she's not getting any exercise and could be socially isolated, too, which won't help her general health. Try suggesting that you both go to an enclosed space, like a shopping mall, where she won't have to suffer the cold but will still move around and interact with others.

Finally, maybe the warmth has nothing to do with her lethargy. This could be caused by many things, so all the more reason you mom needs a check-up. ☺



## Get in touch

Dr. Jason may be able to address your concerns in a future issue.

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