

Is Crying Good Or Bad For Your Skin? Derms Weigh In



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Social media and advertising have gradually made us see skin as an aesthetic

feature rather than a functioning organ. However, your skin does not operate by what trends come and go or whether dewy skin or matte finish is considered in style. Your skin functions like an organ, meaning it's directly impacted by [how much you sleep](#), what you eat, and yes, even the tears you cry.

Whether or not crying is good for your skin is a frequently asked question, but the answer isn't cut and dried. That being said, there are a few different pros and cons to consider, as well as post-cry skin care tips you might want to have on hand.

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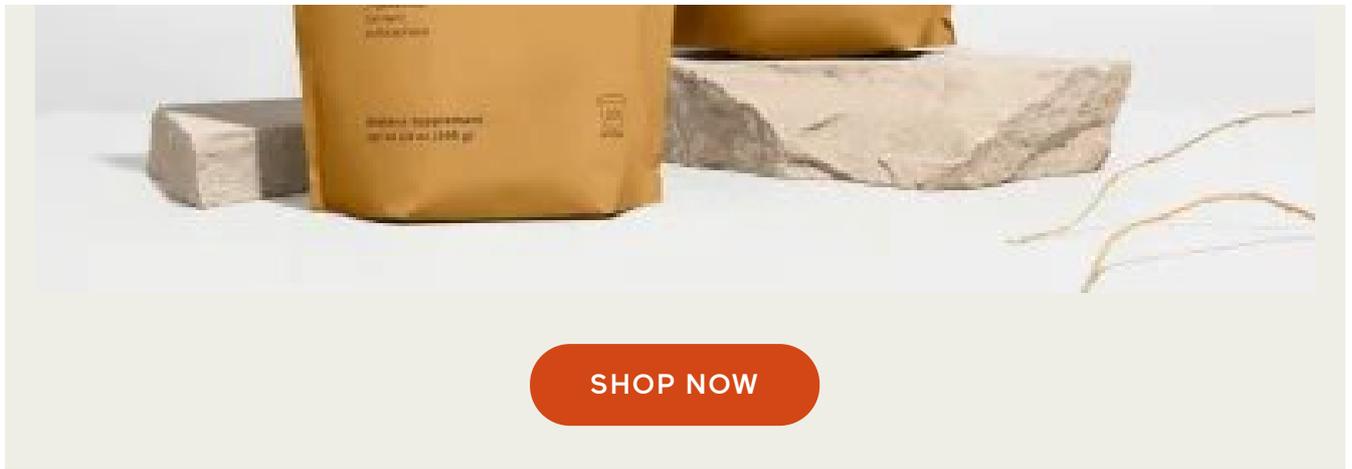
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Your skin is connected to the brain via the [gut-brain-skin axis](#)^{1✓}—therefore, it may reflect mood changes and the state your mental health is in. This doesn't mean that the second you're feeling down your skin will crumble, but you may notice changes over time with consistent emotional distress.

Take [stress breakouts](#), for example: "Our skin is both an immediate stress perceiver as well as a target of the stress responses," board-certified dermatologist [Keira Barr, M.D.](#), [previously told mbg](#). "This is why the presence of acne not only contributes to a feeling of stress, but acne is more common in those who experience a higher intensity of stress from life events," she added.

When you're stressed, your body will release a hormone called [cortisol](#). High cortisol levels trigger a chain reaction in the body including activating sebocytes, the epithelial cells that produce sebum—the waxy, oily stuff that protects the skin. However, when sebum production is cranked up too far, that is [linked to acne](#)^{2✓}. What's more, stress has been shown to [slow wound healing](#)^{3✓}, too.

All of this to say, your skin can certainly be impacted by emotional stress. However, crying can actually [relieve that same emotional stress](#)^{4✓}, so don't hold back your tears any time soon.

Why we cry: Emotional benefits of crying.

While social stigmas may have you think of crying as a sign of weakness, the opposite is true. See when you shed tears, you're directly facing an unwanted

emotion in your mind, be it shame, grief, anger, etc.—and that's not easy.

Luckily, once these emotions are at the surface, they can be dealt with then and there. Plus, research echoes that once the tears begin to flow, [your body actually releases stress and you may even have an easier time falling asleep](#)⁴✓. Hence, why you might feel both relieved and sleepy post-cry.

To get more specific, research has shown that [crying releases unique hormones in the body](#), such as oxytocin and endorphins, which help relieve physical and psychological pain while reducing other stress-related hormones such as adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH).

"Crying can help one better manage their emotional stress and strengthen relationships as a result of a healthy, safe response to negative outcomes or situations," district medical director at One Medical [Michael Chen, M.D.](#), [once told mbg](#). "Crying can help one's mood by improving sleep, reducing inflammation, and strengthening the [immune system](#)."

All of this to say: You don't need to hold back your tears just for the sake of doing so. Crying is actually good for your mental and physical health, so consider science on your side. Of course, you should make sure you're in a comfortable and safe situation before doing so, but letting the tears flow will help you feel better mentally and physically.

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What tears are made of & how they impact skin.

But what are tears, actually? "Tears have a similar structure to saliva in that they are mostly made of water but also contain salt, fatty oils, and over 1,500 proteins," board-certified dermatologist at Marmur Medical [Rachel Westbay, M.D., FAAD](#), tells mbg.

PSA: There's more than one kind of tear. "Emotional tears have a different chemical composition than standard tears we know to lubricate the eyes all day

long," Westbay explains.

"Emotional tears, also known as psychic tears, have higher concentrations of protein-based hormones, including prolactin, as well as the neurotransmitter leucine enkephalin—a painkiller produced when one experiences stress," she continues.

"Interestingly, this confers greater viscosity, so emotional tears stay on your face longer, which researchers believe may be a biological advantage in that it helps others see your distress and help you appropriately," Westbay finishes. Pretty cool, right?

So, how do emotional tears actually affect your skin? Part of the answer is hidden in the pH difference. See, tears have a pH level similar to saline, which is right around 7. This happens to be higher than the [pH of our skin](#), "Which is typically a pH of around 5.5 to 6," she explains.

"Consequently, while short-term exposure to tears is unlikely to be harmful, long-term exposure can produce irritation and affect skin hydration by way of altering the natural pH," Westbay says. Read: A good cry session won't be detrimental to your skin's pH in a few minutes.

"Tears also contain electrolytes, which explains their salty taste, and the sodium and chloride content, specifically, can alter the skin's normal fluid balance," Westbay explains. "Thanks to osmosis, water travels to wherever the fluid is more concentrated, in order to maintain homeostasis."

So, when the more concentrated "side" of your skin is the outside (given the recent flow of tears), water moves from inside your [skin's barrier](#) to the surface to try to balance both sides, Westbay says. This may result in [dehydration](#) of the skin's superficial layers, she adds.

The answer: Focus on replenishing hydration to the skin post-cry (yes, it's really that simple). To come, a few expert-backed methods to do just that.

Why eyes get puffy after crying & what that means for your skin.

As stated above, the electrolytes in tears can dehydrate the skin. This will be more prevalent in sensitive areas of the face like the eyes, where the skin is naturally thinner.

"This causes your eyes to appear [puffy](#), which is only aggravated when you rub them while you're crying," she says. If you produce a lot of tears (meaning you cry for more than a few minutes), the nearby blood vessels dilate to increase blood flow to the eye area because tears are derived from the blood supply. "This also increases swelling and inflammation," Westbay explains.

"This is often exacerbated by the (often forceful) rubbing and wiping away of tears around the eyes, a mechanical friction that can further damage the skin's sensitive barrier," Westbay says. So, while you may not be able to avoid red or puffy eyes post-cry, you may be able to ease the irritation if you're mindful of how you rub your eyes (try to gently dab, not rub).

So, you'll want to be sure to include your unde-eyes in your post-cry skin care routine, as they'll likely need the most TLC.

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So, is crying good for your skin? Well, there are a few things to consider.

That was a ton of information, so let's run through the basics again so you can take the gist with you:

- **Crying is good for your mental health:** Crying can relieve stress and even help you sleep better—two things you probably need after an emotionally triggering day or event. We know that stress negatively affects your skin, so opting for self-soothing acts like crying is only going to help you out in the long run.
- **Tears may momentarily dry out the skin:** Emotional tears have a higher pH than your

skin and they contain electrolytes. The result? Tears may dry out the superficial layer of your skin barrier—but only momentarily. Crying will not damage your skin long term, and your complexion will bounce back even quicker if you follow the steps below.

- **Crying can make your eyes puffy:** When you cry, your eyes will likely become puffy thanks to the dehydration of the skin and rubbing that often comes along with tears. Your eyes may be inflamed and swollen for a few hours (or even longer) post-cry. However, a cold compress can help (more on that to come).

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How to help your skin & yourself post-cry.

So, now you know how tears affect your skin—but what can you do to ease the impact? Well, first know that a good crying session is actually a self-soothing method to be praised, not looked down upon. You're doing your future self a huge favor by facing these emotions head-on rather than pushing them down even deeper.

After you finish crying, though, you may be left with an odd feeling. Maybe you're not sure what to do next, you quite literally feel like there are no tears left to cry, or you're starting to feel better but don't understand why (though the oxytocin release can easily explain that).

Luckily, self-care and skin care can go hand in hand. This means the following steps will not only help replenish moisture in your skin but also ease your mind and help you center yourself. Here's what Westbay recommends for post-cry session skin care:

1. Use a cold compress.

"To help diminish puffiness, a cool washcloth can be super helpful, as can putting that washcloth in a ziplock bag and putting it in the freezer for 10 to 15 minutes to let it get even cooler before applying to affected areas," she says.

You don't want the towel to get so cold that it burns your skin (as placing raw

ice on the skin often can) but definitely cold enough to stay cool for more than a minute or so.

"This cold helps constrict the vessels and tissue to help reduce redness and swelling," Westbay says. Be sure to keep the compress over your eyes if that area looks puffier as well.

Before you sit down for 10 to 15 minutes to let the towel really cool your skin, you may consider putting on your favorite clothes, wrapping yourself up in a blanket, turning on your favorite music, dimming the lighting, or even lighting a candle (that won't catch anything on fire while your eyes are closed, of course).

These small tweaks to your current environment can help you begin to feel like that crying session is officially over, which may help you continue on with your day should you need to.

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2. Slather on a hydrating moisturizer or mask.

Because your skin is likely dehydrated, you should skip any exfoliating for the time being. Remember: Self-soothing and skin-soothing go hand-in-hand. Instead, use a deeply [nourishing moisturizer](#) or hydrating mask, if you have a few minutes to spare for the latter.

Westbay recommends looking for [humectants](#) like hyaluronic acid, aloe vera, and glycerin. If you want to whip up your own mask, [one of these five DIY aloe vera](#) formulas will definitely check the box.

3. Give your skin a lymphatic massage.

Either before or after you go in with a hydrating moisturizer or mask, you'll want to consider giving yourself a [lymphatic drainage facial massage](#). Do this by first applying a [face oil](#) or rich moisturizer and massaging your skin from the inside

out.

If you like to use tools, opt for a jade roller or gua sha to assist in the process. [You can find all of the steps you need here if you're starting from scratch.](#)

4. Listen to what your body needs.

Beyond skin care, you should take a minute to think about what your mind and body are truly craving post-cry session. Everyone has their own version of self-soothing, and for some people that may *not* include an extensive skin care routine—and that's OK.

After you cry, you may choose to do one of the following things either in addition to the steps above or instead of the topical routine:

- Call a loved one.
- Write in your journal.
- Go on a walk.
- Take a nap.
- Take a long shower or bath.
- Exercise or stretch.
- Watch a funny movie or TV show.

The options are truly endless, and the most important thing to do is to listen to your emotions and find your own best comfort zone.

FAQ

Do tears make your skin clear?



Why does your skin glow after crying?



Does crying cause pimples?



The takeaway.

Facing your emotions head-on isn't easy, but you'll thank yourself in the long run for letting your tears flow. In fact, crying can actually make you feel less stressed both physically and mentally. To ensure these tears don't dry out your skin too much, apply a hydrating moisturizer or mask post-cry. If you're concerned about puffy eyes, apply a cool compress to ease the swell. If you want to learn even more about crying and why it's so good for you (and when it may not be helpful), [this guide is for you](#).



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