Skin is your first layer of defense against the outside world. Skin can also give important clues to your overall health. Learn to take good care of your skin, so your skin can keep taking good care of you.

Skin protects your body in many ways. “The skin provides a barrier to protect the body from invasion by bacteria and other possible environmental hazards which can be dangerous for human health,” says NIH dermatologist, Dr. Heidi Kong.

Skin can also alert you to a health problem. A red, itchy rash might signal allergies or infections, and a red “butterfly” rash on your face might be a sign of lupus. A yellow tint might indicate liver disease. And dark or unusual moles might be a warning sign of skin cancer.

Your skin can become too dry if you don’t drink enough fluids or spend too much time in sunny or dry conditions.

The sun can damage your skin as well. Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) light which causes sunburn and makes your skin age faster, leading to more wrinkles as you get older. Wear hats and other protective clothing, and use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30.