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Cold Weather Skin-Care Tips

By Courtney Hargrave

Cold air, wind, and indoor heat are only three of the reasons your skin suffers in the winter.

"These conditions suck the moisture out of your skin, leaving it dull and dry, as well as itchy and irritated," says Jessica Wu, MD, clinical instructor in dermatology at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center and skin and beauty expert for EverydayHealth.com. Additionally, certain skin conditions, such as eczema, psoriasis, and "winter itch," can develop or become aggravated in the winter.

You can combat the effects of cold weather by altering your skin-care routine. Here's our best advice for keeping your skin soft and supple all winter long.

Revamp your skin-care regimen. Your basic skin-care routine should get an overhaul when the temperature outside starts to drop. Limit your time in the shower, and bathe in warm rather than hot water, since hot water can strip your skin of moisture. Use a body wash instead of bar soap, which can often be too harsh; pat, don't rub, yourself dry; and apply a moisturizer liberally when the skin is still moist. "Those of us with very dry skin may need to use a moisturizer two or three times per day," says Kathy Schwarzenberger, MD, associate chief and residency program director, Division of Dermatology, at University of Vermont College of Medicine and member of the Women's Dermatologic Society.

You may also want to consider using a humidifier at night. "Not only will it help your skin, it will also soothe dry throat and nasal passages," says Dr. Wu.

Choose the right moisturizer. Moisturizers work not by putting water into the skin, but by slowing the natural loss of water from the skin. Look for one that's both thick and mild. "I typically tell my patients that when it comes to choosing a moisturizer, the greasier, the better," says Dr. Schwarzenberger. Stay vigilant with your moisturizer use. "With regular use these products will help repair the microscopic fissures in your skin's barrier layer, preventing further outbreaks of itchy, winter skin," says Wu. But for your face, remember to use an oil-free lotion in order to minimize clogged pores.

Protect your skin from the elements. Just because it's cold outside doesn't mean you're safe from sunburn. "The winter sun can reflect off the snow, particularly at high altitudes," says Amy Derick, MD, a private-practice dermatologist based in Barrington, Illinois, and frequent guest expert on NBC News, *The View*, and CNN.com. Always apply sunscreen to

exposed areas of skin, including the face, tops of ears, and backs of hands, and use a lip balm to prevent chapping. If it's windy or you've been blowing your nose, it's also a good idea to apply a balm or ointment to your nostrils.

The clothes you wear are also important. Wool fibers can irritate sensitive skin and aggravate rashes, so wear a T-shirt made of smooth natural fibers (cotton, silk, or linen) and layer your sweater over it. "This will help wick away sweat, and you can remove the sweater if it gets warm inside," says Wu.

Ward off winter itch. "Winter itch, also known as asteatotic eczema, is a relatively common condition that usually starts with patches of dry, flaky skin that may begin to crack," says Schwarzenberger. "Mild cases often respond to changing your bathing habits and moisturizers alone, but more-inflamed skin may benefit from a topical ointment prescribed by your doctor."

Alter your diet. Since dry winter weather robs your skin of moisture, it's important to increase your intake of water and other fluids. "Avoid caffeinated drinks like soda and coffee, which can have a diuretic effect," says Wu. "Some studies have also shown that dietary fatty acids such as omega-3 [found in fish and flaxseed oils] and omega-6 [found in evening primrose oil] may help dry skin by replenishing your skin's natural oils, so consider incorporating these foods and supplements into your diet."

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