

WINTER SKIN CARE

The weather outside may be frightful, but your skin doesn't have to be.

Cold weather. Wind. Snow. It's enough to dry out your skin, not to mention make it itchy, chapped and flaky. What to do to avoid winter skin woes? Here's a primer to keep up with your skin care as the outside temperatures drop.

GO COOLER

During the colder months, experts advise taking lukewarm showers or baths. It turns out that very hot bathing can dry out the skin by breaking down protective lipid barriers that retain moisture. You also should stay in the water less time, no more than 10 minutes (five is optimal). If you still prefer showers or baths at hotter temperatures, limit the number of times you bathe in a day.

When you do bathe, use mild, alcohol-free soaps and cleansers that don't strip away moisture from the skin. You also can try applying oatmeal or baking soda, both of which can relieve skin that is dry and itchy.

FLAKES BEGONE

Exfoliate, exfoliate, exfoliate. Getting rid of dead skin cells is highly recommended to nurture healthy skin, especially during the winter. You can exfoliate your skin yourself with a loofah sponge and/or over-the-counter creams and scrubs. Another option is to visit a facialist or dermatologist for chemical or enzyme exfoliations—the former uses alpha hydroxy and beta hydroxy acids to treat the skin's surface, while the latter dissolves dead cells on sensitive skin with products containing proteolytic enzymes. Exfoliate once or twice a week with hydrating, alcohol-free products.

LOVE YOUR LOTION

To protect and heal winter skin, apply moisturizer daily, particularly to exposed body parts like your face, neck and hands. A great time to slather on the lotion is right after bathing, when your skin is more prone to lock in moisture. Oil-based moisturizers are best for the colder months, because they create a "shield" that retains moisture and

safeguards the skin from the elements. Look for non-clogging oils like almond, mineral and avocado. You can also use products with humectants, substances that attract moisture to the skin.

Pay special attention to your feet and hands, which tend to dry out more than the rest of the body. Solid lotion bars made of essential oils, Shea butter and beeswax can soothe calluses and promote long-lasting effects.

STICK WITH SUNSCREEN

Even if the sun doesn't seem to be shining as much, its rays can still be harmful. In fact, winter sun along with snow glare can be just as damaging as summer sunshine. Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen (with an SPF of at least 15) thirty minutes before going outside, and reapply throughout the day if you'll be outdoors.

Protect your lips from the sun as well. Because lips do not contain glands or lipids to hold in moisture, it's necessary to keep them hydrated. So carry lip balm and apply it generously.

MINIMIZE EXPOSURE

If you must venture out, wear protective clothing and dress in layers to keep the wind and cold at bay and prevent your skin from losing moisture. If you can, put on thin cotton gloves under wool ones to avoid irritation from the wool while staying warm. And when gloves and socks get wet, pull them off, as they can cause your skin to crack, itch and possibly develop sores or eczema.

FOOD TO FIGHT THE ELEMENTS

You can help maintain your healthy winter skin by eating right. Consider fish like salmon and trout, which are high in omega-3s that retain moisture and preserve the skin's natural oil barrier; tomatoes, known for blocking out damaging UV rays; berries, shown to be high in antioxidants; and green tea, hailed for its all-around healing properties. And don't forget to include enough vitamin A in your diet—this super vitamin, found in foods like spinach, kale, egg yolk, cheese and liver, plays an important role in preventing the skin from becoming dry and flaky. ▲

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