# Winter Skin Care Tips

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The arrival of colder weather not only brings with it snow and ice, but also chapped lips and dry, itchy skin. Because dry, itchy, or cracked skin is also a common side effect of some cancer treatments, you may have found that keeping your skin healthy and hydrated has gotten even harder as the humidity level has dropped.

Never fear! Here are seven easy ways to give your skin the extra care and attention it needs this winter.

**(1) Bundle up.**

Dry, windy weather conditions can aggravate dry skin. And extremely cold temperatures can cause the skin and underlying tissue to freeze, leading to frostbite [1]. Therefore, it is very important to wear clothes that will protect your skin from freezing temperatures, including a coat, hat, scarf that wraps around your face, gloves or mittens, heavy socks, and waterproof shoes or boots. Dressing in layers is also a good idea. Put clothes made from soft, breathable fabrics closest to your skin and then add a warm sweater or fleece on top.

**(2) Limit the amount of time you spend in the bath or shower.**

Personally, there's nothing like a long, hot bath or shower to make a cold, dreary day a little better. However, according to the experts, it's best to stick with short (no more than 10 minutes), lukewarm baths/showers to prevent dry, itchy skin. Also, consider using a washcloth rather than a loofah or a sponge.

**(3) Use gentle soaps and laundry detergents.**

The chemicals, scents, and perfumes found in many soaps, cosmetics, lotions, and laundry detergents can dry out and irritate skin that has already been affected by winter weather or cancer treatment. Choose gentle "fragrance-free" or "unscented" soaps and detergents or products that are made for babies.

**(4) Moisturize, moisturize, moisturize.**

According to Mario Lacouture, MD, Cancer.Net Specialty Editor and dermatologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, it is best to use creams or ointments rather than lotions because the thicker consistency helps prevent skin dehydration better. If your skin is itchy, moisturizers with menthol or pramoxine will be especially soothing, while a cream or ointment that has an anti-inflammatory corticosteroid (usually prescribed by a doctor) is best for red or inflamed skin. Try to apply the moisturizer all over your body within 15 minutes of showering and at night before bedtime. You may also want to wear cotton gloves or socks to bed (after you apply the cream) if your fingertips or the soles of your feet are cracking.

For sore, cracked lips, Dr. Lacouture recommends using a hydrating lip balm or a cream/ointment that contains hydrocortisone.

**(5) Drink lots of fluids.**

Keeping your skin healthy and hydrated not only depends on what you put on it, but also what you put into it. According to the Institute of Medicine, women should aim to consume at least nine cups of water each day and men should shoot for 12.5 cups. This includes the water found in food, as

well as what you drink. If you aren't a fan of plain water, try drinking a flavored water or herbal tea. Eating foods with a high water content, like lettuce, watermelon, broccoli, soup, and yogurt is another good option.

**(6) Invest in a humidifier.**

Running a humidifier increases the amount of moisture in the hot, dry air that blasts out of our central heating systems and space heaters during the winter. And having more moisture in the air helps keep skin from drying out. Place several small humidifiers throughout your house, focusing on the rooms you spend the most time in.

?Warm-mist humidifiers, which are also called steam or evaporative, are preferable to cool-mist humidifiers, also known as ultrasonic or impeller,? says Dr. Lacouture. ?The warm-mist machines create fewer pollutants, so they may be a better choice for people living with cancer.? Aim to keep the humidity level consistently between 30% and 50%.

**(7) Wear sunscreen.**

Even in the winter it is important to put on sunscreen before you head outside, especially if you are taking medications that make your skin more sensitive to the sun (such as specific types of antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, antifungals, blood pressure medications, and chemotherapies) or if it?s snowy. Snow reflects the damaging ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun, increasing your chances of getting sunburned. According to Dr. Lacouture, you should choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB radiation, is water resistant, and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.

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