

Winter Skin News

You know what we say in Michigan – “If you don’t like the weather, just wait a minute... it will change.” That is so true!! It’s that time of year again, and you should know that skin is not happy when the weather changes so drastically from day to day. There are special precautions that can be taken to avoid skin problems at this time of year.

There are factors that contribute to excessively dry, itchy skin in the fall and winter months. Forced air heat in the home decreases indoor humidity, causing dry indoor air. Cold temperatures dry the outside air. Hot water in the shower/bath decreases the level of natural skin oil. Deodorant soaps can be irritating and drying. Harsh fabrics (e.g. wool) can also irritate the skin. So by now you are asking – Oh my, should I not fire up the heat, avoid going outside, and take cold showers with no soap??? Thank goodness the solution is easier than that.

If you tend to have dry, ashy, scaly skin on the body, try incorporating some or all of the following changes to ease the skin’s transition into winter mode.

Consider adding a humidifier to your home’s heating system, or to individual rooms if you have forced air heat. For radiator heat, this step is usually not necessary.

When in the shower or bath, use warm, NOT HOT water. If the water is steaming up the shower or bathroom, it is too hot, and will overly dry the skin. Avoid deodorant soaps, as they tend to be very fragrant and harsh, and can cause sensitivity and dryness. If you must use a deodorant soap for odor control, limit the use only to odor prone areas like underarms and groin. Unscented or fragrance free, moisturizing soaps in liquid or bar form are more skin friendly. As an aside – keep in mind that “unscented” and “fragrance free” do not mean the same thing. Unscented products may use masking fragrances to counteract a chemical odor, and fragrances can be irritating to some individuals. Fragrance free products may smell medicinal to you. If you ever experience irritation or discomfort after using any soap or other skin product, discontinue it immediately.

Next, limit the time in the shower or bath to 10 minutes, especially in winter months. The longer skin is in water, the more leeching of natural oil occurs. When exiting the water, towel off until the skin is damp, NOT completely

dry. This is the best time to apply a high quality, unscented or fragrance free, thick moisturizer to the entire skin. Try to do this step while still in the humidity of the bathroom. It will help to seal some of the water from the bath into the skin. If you wait until you are completely dry, you have missed a golden opportunity for skin hydration.

For moisturizer selection, there are a few things to keep in mind. As before, unscented or fragrance free is best. In winter, your moisturizer should be thick. It should come in a jar, and you should be able to turn the jar upside down without the product running out. These criteria will usually lead you to a cream or ointment. They tend to stay on the skin longer than lotion. It's not that lotions won't work, after all some brand name lotions are thick and will do a good job, but most are too thin and will have to be reapplied too frequently during the day to be effective. Even with creams and ointments, you may have to moisturize more than once daily, especially on very cold days.

Finally, if you are wearing a harsh fabric, try to incorporate layers, including cotton next to the skin, protecting you from irritation.

I know this is a lot to digest, but winters in Michigan can be tricky and your skin needs all the help it can get. Here's hoping for a short, sweet and best winter ever for your skin.

Good luck,
Dr. Bobbi