

The Drying Season

9 ways to winterize yourself

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YOU PRY YOUR FROZEN HANDS from the steering wheel and dash up the driveway with the wind whipping your hair. As you enter your home, you gratefully feel a blast of hot air and promise yourself you'll take a long, relaxing bath with your favourite suds tonight. Sound familiar? But for many Canadians, winter's unique elements — cold dry outdoor air, aggressive winds and hot dry indoor air — often add up to uncomfortably dry skin and hair. Here's how to winterize yourself from top to toe.

1. COVER UP

When you're outdoors, protect your exposed areas such as hair, face and hands as much as possible with a hood, hat, scarf, gloves or mitts. Avoid wearing rough fabrics such as wool next to the skin; choose fleece, microfibre or cotton instead. "Hands are particularly vulnerable to dry skin because the skin on the back of hands is thinner, and they're constantly in contact with water, wind and cold, so gloves with a soft liner are a must," says Dr. Denise Wexler, a London, Ont.-based dermatologist and president of the Canadian Dermatology Association. And speaking of clothes, minimize potential fragrance irritation by using an unscented laundry detergent and skipping the fabric softener.



2. AN OCEAN OF LOTION

“The most important thing is to moisturize dry skin many times throughout the day,” notes Wexler. Look for a moisturizer that doesn’t contain alcohol or fragrance, which potentially can be irritating. “The fewer ingredients, the better,” she says. (See “Cocktail for the skin,” below, for more details on moisturizer ingredients.)

3. EAT YOUR OILS

Is your eczema flaring up this winter? Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids — such as flaxseed, hempseed oil, canola oil and walnuts, as well as fatty cold-water fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines — may help keep your skin healthy, according to a few studies. For example, a 2005 study published in the *Journal of Dermatological Treatment* looked at people with eczema (inflamed, itchy red skin often made worse by low humidity and warm indoor air). Over 20 weeks, the participants in the study who consumed hempseed oil had improvements in skin dryness and itchiness and required less medication, compared with those who consumed olive oil.



4. ADD H₂O

Use a humidifier to ramp up the moisture in your home’s indoor air. A level between 30% and 50% is generally good.



5. SCREEN THE SUN

Even incidental sun exposure at your lunchtime walk on a winter’s day adds up over time, so choose a daily facial moisturizer with an SPF of 30 or more. Spending the day skiing, skating or ice fishing? Reapply your moisturizer every two hours if you’re outside. You can also spritz uncovered hair with a hairspray that contains an ultraviolet (UV) filter to protect it from the drying effects of the sun.



6. DON'T FORGET YOUR PEEPERS

UV rays can also damage your eyes (especially when there’s a glare from bright snow or ice on the slopes or in the fields). Wear wraparound sunglasses that block glare and 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB rays, suggests the Canadian Association of Optometrists.

7. HELP YOUR HAIR

“If you have a dry scalp, choose a dandruff shampoo that removes the scale on the scalp. If you have dry hair, on the other hand, choose a mild shampoo with a conditioner,” Wexler explains. “To prevent overly dry hair, apply shampoo mainly to the scalp rather than the hair itself.”



8. SHORTEN THE SOAK

A half-hour hot bath or shower is tempting but will ultimately deplete the skin’s moisture. Instead, take a five- to 10-minute lukewarm shower or bath using a mild unscented cleanser. “Then pat, not rub, yourself dry, and within three minutes, apply moisturizer to your skin,” says Wexler. You may have heard that exfoliating will remove dead skin cells and help lotion sink in, but it may actually remove the skin’s natural protective oils, she says.

9. PROTECT YOUR PUCKER

Prevent chapped lips with a coating of lip balm, preferably one with an SPF of at least 30. “If your lips are cracking, see a dermatologist, because you could have eczema,” says Wexler.

A COCKTAIL FOR THE SKIN

Most skin moisturizers contain these three main types of ingredients:

EMOLLIENTS (e.g., lauric acid, linoleic acid and linolenic acid) fill in the spaces between skin cells and make the skin look and feel smoother.

HUMECTANTS (e.g., glycerine, hyaluronic acid, lecithin and sorbitol) help attract moisture to the skin.

OCCCLUSIVES (e.g., petrolatum (aka petroleum jelly), lanolin, mineral oil and silicone) help seal moisture into the skin.