

Winter Dry Skin

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

Problems with winter dry skin vary a great deal from one person to another, but the common symptoms are generalized itching of the skin, usually worse on thighs and arms. The itching is caused by a loss of skin oils.

Maintaining Healthy Skin in the Winter

Bathing/Showering suggestions:

- Avoid long, hot showers and baths as they leach the natural oils out of the skin. Use lukewarm water. Try shortened bathing time.
- Mild soap tends to be the least irritating and most protective of the skin barrier during the winter months: try Cetaphil, Basis, Aveeno, Neutrogena Tone, Dove Unscented, and Vanicream. Avoid Ivory as it is one of the most drying.
- After getting out of the bath, blot (do not rub) your skin.
- While the skin is still wet, apply a moisturizer to trap the moisture in the skin.
- Greasier products (aquaphor, vaseline) tend to be most effective. If you are uncomfortable using a greasier product during the day, you may prefer to use these products only at night.

Living space Modifications:

- Increase the humidity of indoor air during the winter.
- A cold steam vaporizer is more effective if it runs constantly during the cold weather season.

- Potted plants and/or pans of water on the radiator may also increase the humidity in your room.

Medications:

- It may be necessary to use an over-the-counter antihistamine (such as cetirizine, loratadine, or diphenhydramine) to decrease itchiness. Antihistamines often cause drowsiness, which makes them useful at night.
- Avoid scratching, which prolongs and worsens the condition.

In patients who develop eczema as a result of dry skin, it is advised to follow up with a medical professional.