No doubt the drop in temperatures, combined with low humidity and indoor heating, can strip the skin of moisture and cause dryness and cracking. However, making a few simple changes to your daily skin care routine in the winter months can help offset this problem.

The skin is made up of several layers of cells. The epidermis, the top layer of the skin, along with the oil glands, produces lipids (fatty substances), and these lipids keep the skin from losing moisture and make it soft and supple. But your skin is constantly losing moisture into the air and every time you wash your skin, you strip away these lipids, letting more moisture evaporate and drying the skin.

Moisturise Your Skin Properly

However, in humid conditions, the skin can replenish itself by soaking up moisture from the air. When the humidity drops, as it does in many places in the winter, your skin loses another opportunity to moisturize itself. Couple that with the low humidity of indoor heating, as well as hot showers and baths, and your skin is bound to become dry and irritated.

The most important winter skin care tip that dermatologists give patients is to moisturise properly. When choosing a moisturiser, check product labels and look for lotions and creams containing any of the following ingredients: petrolatum; mineral oil; linoleic acid; ceramides; dimethicone; or glycerin. For best results, she recommends applying moisturisers to the skin within three minutes of stepping out of the shower or bath. This will help trap the water in the upper layers of the skin and decrease dryness and itching.

Certain Cosmetics Can Provide Added Benefits for Your Skin

In addition to moisturisers, certain cosmetic ingredients, such as antioxidants, can provide added benefits to your skin care routine in the winter. On an average day, your skin is exposed to pollution and ultraviolet rays from the sun that can cause aging and other damage. Yet during the winter, extra time spent indoors may increase your exposure to cigarette and cigar smoke, which leads to free radical formation and can increase the skin's aging process. Antioxidants can counteract these free radicals and help to prevent aging skin, and even skin cancer.

Other cosmetic ingredients that can be beneficial for winter skin are retinoids. Although products containing retinoids can be used in the summer, you can use them in the winter with less worry of increased sun sensitivity since people tend to spend more time indoors. Retinoid products can be used to decrease acne and oiliness, reduce the appearance of fine lines, wrinkles and age spots, and help prevent the signs of aging.

Retinoids are a great way to reduce the appearance of sun spots that developed over the summer. However, products containing retinoids may be drying and increase the chance of skin flaking and redness, so it's important to use them with heavy moisturisers. Also, if you are using retinoids and plan to be in the sun, you should wear a sunscreen containing an SPF of 15 or higher, regardless of the season, to combat the increased sun sensitivity that is associated with these products.

While over-the-counter (OTC) retinoid products are becoming more widespread in the consumer marketplace, some patients may require higher levels of retinoids than what you can buy OTC to see results, and these products are available only by prescription. If you have extremely dry skin, look for a retinoid product that contains mineral oil and is therefore more hydrating.

Source:
www.thecountrydoctor.com,
www.allergies.about.com

Winter Can Be Tough on Skin

Winter can be tough on skin. Cold temperatures, low humidity and dry indoor heating combine to rob the skin of moisture, leaving it dry and flaky, said Sarah Myers, M.D., dermatologist at Duke University Medical Center, who offers the following tips for winter skin care.

Shorten baths or showers

Long, hot baths can eventually strip the skin of lipids, or moisturising fats. Frequent long showers or baths do not add moisture but take away protection.

Use moisturiser

Choose soap or cleanser with oils and emollients. After bathing, pat dry, then replenish with an overall body moisturizer. Oils can also be added to bath water, which can penetrate and nourish the skin. But they can also make the tub slippery, so be especially careful getting out.

Apply toners and astringents sparingly

These are liquids used after cleaning, just before applying a moisturiser. Because they are typically alcohol-based, they can dry the skin. Look for products with low alcohol content.

Don't forget the sunscreen

Many products are a combination of sunscreen and moisturiser. Usually the recommended products have an SPF of 15. Most people are in and out during the day, and casual sun exposure adds up. This is one of the best daily products people can use.

Rejuvenate skin

Many people use topical night creams and other cosmetic products containing retinoids. These can help reduce facial lines, wrinkles and age spots. Look for products containing mineral oil or other moisturising agents. Products containing higher levels of these ingredients are available only by prescription.

Control environmental factors

Humidifying the environment can help replenish moisture. Consider a humidifier in your bedroom at night, when you're spending most of your time there. Reduce exposure to cigar and cigarette smoke, which can speed the skin's aging process.

Stimulate and exfoliate

Rubbing the skin's surface daily with a scrub or washcloth stimulates the skin and removes dead cells, which can clog the pores. However, the process can strip some of the lipids that are integral to keeping your skin moist, especially during the winter, if overdone.