

# Itchy & scratchy?

Winter can wreak havoc on your skin, but you don't need to flake out just because the temperature's dropping. Here's how to beat our five most common winter skin complaints

Your skin is the largest organ in the body. "The epidermis protects your body from invasion and helps seal in moisture," says Dr Phillip Artemi, dermatologist and spokesperson for the Australasian College of Dermatologists. "The next layer, the dermis, is where collagen and elastic tissues lie, giving structure and support.

## DRY SKIN

"Dry skin generally has low levels of sebum (oil) and water and is often characterised by a rough and flaky appearance, especially on the legs, hands and trunk," says Artemi.

**Skin salvation** Most dry skin results from environmental factors including exposure to cold weather with low humidity levels, dry air from indoor heating and excessive bathing, advises Artemi. If you want your skin to look radiant, Lisa Borsellino, senior therapist at the Endota Spa, Sydney, advises exfoliating at least once a week to get rid of dead skin cells and promote cell renewal. "Dry body brushing with a loofah or exfoliating gloves just before showering, followed by applying a good rich moisturiser containing humectants (substances that attract and retain moisture) is effective. Look for ingredients such as panthenol (a form of vitamin B derived from plants), shea or cocoa butter."

## ECZEMA

**Eczema simply means inflamed skin, which causes redness and intense itching. "The causes of eczema are both genetic and environmental," says Cheryl Talent, president of the Eczema Association of Australasia. "One in eight children have eczema at one time or another as do one in twelve adults," she adds.**

**Skin salvation** The first step is to get the correct diagnosis from a doctor or dermatologist. "Although there is no cure for eczema, you can reduce its severity through

the use of soap-free cleansers, wearing loose cotton clothing to protect skin from friction and avoiding household chemicals and other known irritants or allergens," says Cheryl.

Dermatologist, Dr Natasha Cook, recommends avoiding hot water when showering and using gentle cleansers and moisturisers, such as QV Intensive or Cetaphil to prevent excessive loss of water through the epidermis. "If the rash returns, topical steroid (corticosteroid) ointments may be prescribed to reduce inflammation," she adds.

## PSORIASIS

**Psoriasis is when the skin cells regenerate far more quickly than normal skin, so the cells tend to fall off resulting in a flaky appearance.**

**Skin salvation** "Practice good skin care, such as frequent moisturising and avoid any products that contain perfumes or fragrances, alcohol or lanolin," advises Dr Cook. Topical treatments, such as cortisone to help alleviate itching, swelling and irritation can also be prescribed.

## ROSACEA

**Rosacea is inflamed skin that typically affects the skin on the face. It often begins as redness across the nose, cheeks, chin or forehead and often flares when something causes the blood vessels under the skin to expand – hence the tell-tale blushing and redness.**

**Skin salvation** Luckily, there are several things you can do to reduce symptoms and keep rosacea from getting worse.

"One of the most important things is to learn what the triggers are and avoid things that make you flush, such as very hot showers, hot beverages, heaters, red wine, strenuous exercise, emotional stress, spicy foods and excessive use of some cosmetics and toiletries that irritate the skin," says Dr Cook. Additionally, there are effective medications to clear rosacea. Ask your dermatologist or doctor about the most suitable treatment for you.

## CRACKED LIPS

**The winter wind chill is notorious for causing dry, cracked and sore lips.**

**Skin salvation** Although it's tempting, avoid licking or biting chapped, dry lips. "Invest in a

treatment lip cream or balm that contains a vitamin A derivative, such as retinol to help cell turnover and prevent build up of dry, dead skin. Also try creams that contain sunscreen to protect the lips from ultraviolet rays," says Dr Cook.



Below: A lip cream with vitamin A will help soothe sore, cracked winter lips.

## WHAT ABOUT DIET?

**The old adage 'you are what you eat' holds true when it comes to your skin.** "Healthy skin can be encouraged by including certain foods in your diet, such as eating plenty of fruit and vegetables – a potent source of antioxidants to help fight free radicals which cause skin damage and skin ageing," says Fernwood consulting dietitian Kylie Andrews. "Eating plenty of foods that are rich in omega-3 will also help keep the skin cells lubricated. Foods such as salmon, walnuts, olive oil, soybeans and ground flaxseeds are also excellent sources," she adds.

New research has also found that omega-6 fats (the less favoured fats in health terms) play a role in helping the body to produce arachidonic acid, which is vital for producing healthy skin.

Recent tests on mice found those unable to produce arachidonic acid developed severe, itchy dermatitis.

## WATER

**Though most dermatologists would argue that the skin's condition is determined specifically by external factors, almost all dietitians would agree that drinking plenty of water for overall health and wellbeing is highly recommended, says Kylie. "We tend to forget to drink water during the colder months and don't realise that dehydration can also occur in the winter time," she adds. So quench your thirst with water first to stay hydrated.**

## QUICK TIPS

- ➔ **USE WARM WATER** for bathing instead of steaming hot water and take shorter and fewer showers.
- ➔ **REPLACE REGULAR SOAPS** with soap-free substitutes with moisturisers that won't wash away the body's own oils.
- ➔ **PAT DRY** with a towel to remove excess water. Never rub dry.
- ➔ **APPLY A MOISTURISER** while your skin is still damp to seal in the water.
- ➔ **IRRITATED SKIN** If your skin is seriously irritated or dry, simple is always best. Opt for fragrance-free preparations developed specifically for sensitised skin. Cetaphil and Ego make excellent products for this. [f/w](#)

Salmon, walnuts, olive oil, soybeans and ground flaxseeds are sources of omega-3 which helps keep skin lubricated in the colder months.

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