

Winter is the time of year when people most often complain of dry skin. It's a matter of simple physics. Skin naturally holds moisture, and cold winter air doesn't hold as much moisture as warm, humid summer air. The problem is compounded with wind chill (which acts like a restroom hand drier).

The result is that water is literally sucked out of your skin. Desiccation is even worse inside, where low humidity air from outside gets heated; warm temperatures promote even more evaporation from your skin surfaces.

Here are some concrete measures you can take to combat winter dry skin:

1) Take fish oil. Americans spend literally billions of dollars on skin creams and moisturizers. I say, get an *internal* lube job. Topping the list of natural skin moisturizing nutrients are the omega-3 fatty acids, linolenic acid, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).



Ask any vet. When pet owners bring in dogs with the “mange”—a dry, flaky skin condition—vets suggest they add canine flax oil and/or fish oil supplements to their dogs' diets.

In addition to its moisturizing properties, fish oil acts as a natural antifreeze for the skin; it also has potent anti-inflammatory effects.

2) Try GLA. Oral supplementation with GLA—an omega-6 oil plentiful in black currant seed, borage and evening primrose—improves skin barrier function and prevents moisture loss.

3) Don't turn your home into a desert! The average humidity in the Sahara Desert is around 15 percent. In winter, the humidity in your house or apartment can dip below 10 percent. Overheating your dwelling makes things worse. Keep the thermostat set to 65 or less and consider using a humidifier. (Remember to clean it frequently!) Houseplants, too, put moisture back into the air.

4) Protect your skin with gloves. This was driven home to me recently when I saw a patient with parchment-like skin on her hands. “It goes away in the summer,” she told me. “Do you wear gloves?” I asked her. “No, I hadn't thought of that,” she replied.

Remember, even if you can grin and bear it when cold weather strikes, gloves should be an essential fashion accouterment for temperatures below 50. Wind chill can lower the surface conditions at your skin surface to near freezing and suck moisture from your skin. Don't wait for frostbite to set in before donning your gauntlets.

5) Shower... less! Trick question: Do you practice good cold weather hygiene? “I shower once or twice daily!” you might reply indignantly. But frequent application of soaps (all soaps, to a greater or lesser extent) mobilizes dirt by dissolving and whisking away the protective oil layer on your skin surface. Washing less leaves the superficial sebaceous oils intact. Avoid prolonged and very hot showers or baths.

6) Slather on the coconut. Virgin coconut oil is a great skin moisturizer. It also has antibacterial, antifungal and anti-inflammatory effects. [Research even supports its use](#) for the itchy, irritated skin disorder atopic dermatitis.

7) Try manuka. A product of New Zealand, [Manuka Therapy Cream](#) is my favorite skin moisturizer. I use it as an aftershave application, especially in winter. It’s not greasy, and it leaves my skin with a lustrous sheen.

As an added benefit, research supports its antiwrinkle effects. [A study published in Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#) found that manuka oil protects against photo-aging and collagen loss.

8) Apply hyaluronic acid. Hyaluronic acid [plays a critical role in skin health](#) with its unique ability to hold in moisture (1,000 ml of water per gram of hyaluronic acid). [Hyaluronic acid](#) makes a nice facial moisturizer.

9) Check your thyroid. One of the cardinal signs of low thyroid is dry skin. Have your physician perform thyroid blood tests. If they’re suboptimal, natural bio-identical thyroid replacement might restore your skin’s luster

10) Make sure you don’t have allergies. Your dry skin might be due to eczema, in which case testing for food allergies might be warranted. A trial of elimination of the most common food culprits (eggs, dairy and wheat) sometimes clears up dry skin patches. Alternatively, you might be suffering from atopic dermatitis; a dermatologist can perform a patch test to see if your skin is reacting to any one of a panel of common substances such as fragrances, preservatives, lanolin, rubber or metal from jewelry.

I hope these tips help restore your dry winter skin back to its summer glory despite the continued snow and chill, and I encourage you to share this list with others who may be in need.