

Tips to avoid dry skin during winter

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Drink water, apply thick moisturizer, avoid harsh cleansers.

(HealthDay)—Throughout the winter, excessive hand washing to prevent the spread of germs can leave skin extremely dry and itchy. Drinking coffee and alcoholic beverages can also lead to dehydration and dry skin, experts say, but proper skin care and hydration can prevent skin from chapping or cracking.

"As the temperature is low and the heater is on, the indoor air gets dehydrated and your skin loses moisture from the environment," said Dr. Michelle Tarbox, a dermatologist and assistant professor of dermatology at Saint Louis University, in a medical center news release. "Water always moves downhill, even on a [microscopic level](#), and when the level of moisture in the air drops due to the heating process, it practically sucks the water out of your skin."

Tarbox offered the following tips to help keep skin hydrated during the winter months:

- **Use a humidifier.** Plug this device in at night and while working to help prevent moisture loss indoors. For best results, use distilled water instead of [tap water](#). "Humidifying the air can reverse the process of skin dehydration and is particularly helpful for patients with dermatitis (an itchy [inflammation of the skin](#))," Tarbox said.
- **Use over-the-counter saline sprays.** These sprays can help keep the mouth, eyes and nasal areas hydrated, particularly during travel. When they are too dry, these mucosal surfaces can become itchy and are less able to protect against [viral infections](#), such as the flu.
- **Avoid harsh cleansers.** Some cleansers are irritating and can lead to hand eczema, a long-term [skin disorder](#), dermatitis and dryness. Replace these cleansers with more mild, skin-friendly products to prevent [dry skin](#). "You can look for some beneficial ingredients like essential oils, jojoba oil and shea butter oil," Tarbox said.
- **Choose the right moisturizer.** Essential oils, jojoba oil and shea butter oil are also beneficial ingredients found in certain moisturizers. Use products that also contain fat molecules known as ceramides that help protect the skin. It's also important for people to choose products suited to their skin type. "The less water a moisturizer has, the longer it will last," Tarbox explained. "When in doubt, thicker is often better while choosing a skin moisturizer."
- **Drink water.** Drinking caffeinated coffee and alcoholic drinks can also lead to dehydration and dry skin. To prevent dehydration, Tarbox recommended drinking one glass of water for each alcoholic or caffeinated beverage consumed.

More information: The American Academy of Dermatology provides more tips on how to relieve [dry skin](#).

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