



Face the elements

From your dry office to a windy walk to a tropical getaway, your skin faces a whole lot of climate changes in winter. Here's how to help it flourish all season long.

By AILEEN BRABAZON Photos by DAN LIM

Winter Wonderland

Harsh weather can be unkind to your face. Irritation, dryness, itchiness, redness, increased sensitivity and dehydration can affect all skin types during those long chilly months of the year. Colder climates and dry air can even aggravate or trigger some skin conditions, such as psoriasis and eczema.

While dry air sucks moisture out of skin, causing dehydration, dryness and sensitivity, going from the chilly streets to hot office buildings leads to redness and irritation. The good news is that climate change doesn't have to get the best of your skin. You just need to combat its effects by practising extreme skincare.

Hydrate

"Forced-air heating in homes and offices dries out our environment," says Dr. Peter Vignjevic, a Hamilton, Ont.-based dermatologist. "Because it's so cold, there isn't much moisture in the air, so the humidity is low, which makes it worse." Vignjevic recommends running a humidifier in your home to add much-needed moisture to your environment.

Moisturize

Make moisturizer your favourite cold-weather product. Morning and night, apply it to damp skin to seal in moisture. It also helps to add an extra layer before going outside for a prolonged period of time. "Doing so provides a barrier to evaporative loss of moisture from the surface of your skin," says Vignjevic. When choosing winter moisturizer, look for soothing ingredients such as red raspberry extract, chamomile, hyaluronic acid and organic silicones to help calm irritation.

If you have sensitive skin, select fragrance-free products. Oily skin can get dehydrated and needs moisture, too, but does better with lighter lotions containing ingredients such as salicylic acid, bisabolol and panthenol, whereas dry skin usually needs richer creams with ingredients such as lecithin, grape-seed extract and vitamins A, C and E.

It also helps to include a hydrating mask in your skincare regimen. "We suggest adding this to your routine once a week, leaving it on for 20 minutes, to balance skin with an extra shot of moisture during the colder, drier months," says Andrea Scott, director of product development and research at Skoah spa in Vancouver. She recommends that those with dry skin look for masks containing emollient oils such as shea butter or highly refined olive oil. Oily skin types should choose masks that are hydrating, oil-free and feature soothing ingredients such as sea kelp algae or cucumber extract.

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Exfoliate

Dead skin can act as a barrier, preventing moisturizer from penetrating deeply into your skin, so it's a good idea to exfoliate two to three times a week with a scrub. Look for products that contain polyethylene beads, which are gentle because they're round, as opposed to those containing ingredients that have sharp edges, such as walnut seeds and salt, which can be rough on skin. And remember not to scrub too hard – many women make the mistake of scouring off dry patches. "They exacerbate the problem and their skin reacts with redness or increased sensitivity," says Scott. "They're often creating a situation where the skin's reaction is to create more oil, which can lead to breakouts."

Intensify

Although your actual skincare routine may stay pretty much the same year-round, you may need to use richer, more hydrating products in the winter, says Leanne McCliskie, education manager for the International Dermal Institute in Toronto. For example, you may need to go from a light moisturizer to one with more lipids (oils) or swap a gel cleanser for a creamier one that is more moisturizing.

tip

"When you have a bath or shower, use cool or lukewarm water because hot water dries out your skin more," says Dr. Peter Vignjevic, a Hamilton, Ont.-based dermatologist. Avoid anti-bacterial soap for the same reason – choose mild soap-free cleansers instead.

Concentrate

If you're already plagued by winter skin problems, McCliskie recommends soothing your skin with a concentrated product (which often come in booster, capsule or serum form) containing healing additives, which are primarily vitamins A, C and E, and anti-inflammatory ingredients, such as lavender and tea tree essential oils and hydracotal or grape-seed extract. These concentrates can be especially useful on areas that are prone to chap, particularly around your nose and upper lip.

Protect

Sunscreen shouldn't only be a summertime staple. The sun's rays do damage during the winter, so slather it on regularly when spending time outside. Make sure you use a sunscreen or moisturizer with an SPF of at least 15.