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WINTER
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Cold Front

From reviving dull skin to preventing dryness, here are the top tips dermatologists have for winter.

By EMILY MACCULLOCH

Whether you're outdoors getting pummeled by the elements or inside with the heat blasting, four-plus months of freezing winds and low humidity levels wreak havoc on all skin types. Both environments can compromise your skin's barrier, which is the outermost layer responsible for locking in moisture. "The level of dryness is determined by the quality of the barrier," comments Dr. Danny Guo, a dermatologist based in Calgary. A weakened barrier opens the door to flakiness and irritation and can even trigger skin conditions like eczema and rosacea.

The good news? A complete overhaul of your skincare routine isn't necessary. "Regardless of the season, you should stick to the same basic steps," says Dr. Nazli Ghiasi, a dermatologist and the owner of MapleDerm in Vaughan, Ont. Gentle cleansing, hydration and sun protection are essential but can be expanded to include antioxidants, exfoliants and retinoids depending on your needs. While the blueprint of your daily routine might remain relatively the same, there are a few simple measures you can take to prevent dryness, irritation and redness before they rear their ugly, flaky heads.

WASH AND BELIEVE

As previously mentioned, maintaining the health of your moisture barrier is a must. "The most important component of having healthy skin, regardless of its condition, is to ensure that the skin barrier is intact," Ghiasi states. Because winter weather conditions are slowly chipping away at your skin (a.k.a. zapping its moisture), lathering up with the right cleanser can help to maintain those all-important hydration levels. Ghiasi recommends swapping out any gel-based washes for a gentler alternative like a cream or foam as it will remove daily dirt and oil without stripping the skin.

TEXTURE TALES

The thickness of your moisturizer is another key factor to consider if you want to take your winter skincare routine to the next level. "Choose moisturizers that provide more protection from the cold," says Guo. "For the most part, thicker products such as balms and ointments are more protective than lotions and gels." Lightweight creams are typically formulated with a high water content; this might sound good for your skin, but most of that water ends up evaporating. "Keeping the skin moisturized is more about retaining your natural water by enhancing your skin barrier than by externally applying water-based products," he explains. Balms, ointments and oils often contain little to no water and have thicker textures and ingredient-rich formulas that act as protectants. If using a heavier product in your morning routine doesn't feel right, try applying your go-to moisturizer and then layering a lightweight oil or balm over it to soften the skin and act as a seal.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MAIN VIA TRUNK ARCHIVE

INGREDIENTS 101

Stacking your beauty routine with the right ingredients will ensure that your skin gets the nourishment it needs to make it through the winter unscathed. While it feels like there's a buzzy new skincare ingredient trending on TikTok every week, there are a few tried-and-tested ones that both derms swear by. At the top of that list is ceramides. Naturally found in the outer layer of the skin, ceramides are fats and lipids that work to hold the skin's cells together and keep the barrier intact. Using a moisturizer that contains this heavy-hitting ingredient is the number one thing you can do to set your skin up for success and help stave off an eczema flare-up. In addition to trusty ceramides, Guo mentions squalane as another barrier repair agent to look for, along with emollients like lanolin and petroleum jelly. He also recommends adding a hyaluronic acid serum into the mix as it acts as a humectant, drawing moisture into the skin.

LOW AND SLOW

Because skin is more likely to become compromised in the winter, if you notice any dryness, redness or irritation, dial back your use of actives (retinoids and exfoliants such as alpha-hydroxy and beta-hydroxy acids). "How frequently you exfoliate should depend on how your skin reacts," says Guo. Using ingredients that can irritate the skin when you have existing dryness can be a recipe for disaster, especially if you're new to using actives like salicylic acid and retinol. The best mantra? Slowly introduce them to your skin, and select products that have low percentages of active ingredients. Choosing a lower-dose retinol—say a 0.1 or 0.3 per cent instead of a 1 per cent—allows you to continue using the popular wrinkle reducer while minimizing the chance of irritation.

YES TO SPF

While wearing sunscreen daily is a must, many skip this essential step once the summer sun fades. "One of the most common misconceptions is that there's no ultraviolet radiation during the wintertime," says Guo. While it's true that UVB, the rays that are responsible for burning the skin, are less intense during the colder months, UVA is present year-round and contributes heavily to premature aging. Look for a sunscreen with an SPF 30 or higher that also contains moisture-replenishing ingredients like squalane and shea butter. ■

SKIN SAVERS



Inspired by the practice of hair co-washing, this rich, balmy formula gently cleanses and conditions without disrupting the skin barrier. Containing a blend of hyaluronic acid and chamomile, this one-step cleanser makes quick work of waterproof makeup, SPF and excess oil. **U Beauty The Mantle Skin Conditioning Wash, \$78**



Step up your sun-protection game with this lightweight mineral sunscreen. With its serum-like texture, this SPF shields skin from both UVA and UVB rays while delivering hydrating ingredients like squalane and vitamin E. **Summer Fridays ShadeDrops Broad Spectrum SPF 30 Mineral Milk Sunscreen, \$47**



This night serum ensures that your skin receives a fresh dose of the formula's 0.3 per cent pure retinol by isolating the active ingredient in a separate pouch that's added to the bottle upon first application. **Kiehl's Retinol Fast Release Wrinkle-Reducing Night Serum, \$98**



Containing a cocktail of powerful antioxidants, minerals and essential fatty acids like amla berry and kokum seed oil, this multi-purpose cocoa butter-based balm can be used on the face and body and in the hair for a hit of hydration. **8 Faces Boundless Solid Oil, \$108**



Packed with a 3 per cent ceramide blend and omega-rich plant oils and butters, this replenishing balm supports the delicate skin around the eye area while delivering much-needed hydration. **Elephant Ceramighty AF Eye Balm, \$79**



This serum is like a tall glass of water for the skin. Hyaluronic acid is known for its ability to hold 1,000 times its weight in water, and when it's combined with the humectant glycerine and soothing aloe vera, it has a plumping and hydrating effect on your skin. **Garnier Hyaluronic Acid and Aloe Replumping Super Serum, \$20**