

Protect Your Family's Skin Against Old Man Winter!

By Kateri DeLaney, R.N., B.S.N.

The Saharan Desert is hardly an image that comes to mind on these cold winter days. Yet the combination of blasting furnaces and very dry air can cause the air in our homes, schools and offices to approach desert conditions!

The result can be dry, irritated skin and cracked lips. Skin is a semi-permeable membrane, and the dry air around us literally draws the moisture right out of it. Adding to the problem is that winter is also cold and flu season, so parents and kids are urged to wash their hands frequently to avoid nasty germs.

Fortunately, there are some easy fixes to protect our skin during the remainder of the winter months:

1. Bathe with Care.

- Daily bathing dries out skin (and hair). Not everyone needs a daily bath – particularly children. Even major media such as the *Today* show are calling into question the need for daily baths. Try going every other day to protect skin and hair.
- Avoid bathing or washing your face in very warm water because it dilates the blood vessels beneath the surface of your skin. That, in turn, causes more moisture to be delivered to the surface of the skin, where it evaporates. Water that's too hot also irritates already dry skin. Use tepid or luke-warm water.
- Limit your bath time to 10 minutes maximum, even in the tub. You want to stay in long enough to get clean and allow the water's moisture to seep into your skin. But if you stay in too long, the reverse starts to happen. The shriveled, prune-like skin from too long a bath occurs because moisture has been drawn out of your skin and into the water,
- If you use a washcloth, make it a soft one. Winter is not the time for a hard loofah scrub – that just irritates dry skin. And when you get out of the bathtub or shower, pat the skin dry; don't rub it vigorously with a towel.
- Apply moisturizer to the skin within three minutes of getting out of the bath to lock the moisture in.

- Mom might consider switching to a milder facial cleaner than may have been used during warmer temperatures. Skinceuticals has many quality products that are available at clinics and online.
- And with all of the hand washing we do to ward off germs, keep a good hand moisturizer handy and use it every time you wash your hands. Or, consider using a hand sanitizer product.

2. Select the proper moisturizer

There are three forms of moisturizers, and what works for you and your children in the summer may not be best for dry winter air.

- **Ointments** are 80% oil and 20% water, and deliver maximum moisturizing power to the skin. Examples of several quality ointments are Topix and Vitamin A and D. Most of these products do contain petroleum, and are typically used for very chapped hands. People may coat their hands with the ointment and then cover them with gloves for an overnight treatment. These and other products are available at select medical aesthetics clinics or online.
- **Creams** are 50% oil and 50% water, and are a very good choice for winter moisturizing. Quality products include Celazome "Spoil Me," which is available online and at select clinics.
- **Lotions** are mostly water, and although they may be fine for humid summer days, they don't provide enough moisturizing power for dry winters.

4. Use sunscreen.

Most people think about protecting their family's faces when they're skiing in the mountains. But sunscreen is also needed on local skiing slopes, when your kids are playing in the snow, and even when you're driving or inside! Snow reflects up to 80 percent of sunlight and can cause a lot of long-term damage. But since it's cold we don't feel the heat and tend not to think about it.

- Get UVB and UVA protection. Most of us are familiar with the abbreviation "SPF", which stands for "Sun Protection Factor." SPF is a necessary ingredient in any sunscreen product, but it only protects against only one segment of ultraviolet radiation, UVB.

UVB rays are the ultra violet rays that are responsible for browning and burning, and as we age, they also cause the brown spots on sun-exposed areas. You may feel you're protecting yourself and your kids if you apply a product with a high SPF number. SPF 15, for example, filters out approximately 94% of UVB rays, but UVB rays only make up about five percent of the ultraviolet radiation that reaches the earth!

- UVA rays are most damaging long-term. They make up more than 90 percent of the ultraviolet radiation we're exposed to, and even penetrate windows to damage the skin when we're driving or indoors! The SPF in most sunscreens doesn't protect us from UVA rays.

UVA rays also contribute to skin cancer, which is on the rise in the United States. The best way to avoid skin cancer is through prevention – starting with our kids.

Some new products that have both UVB and UVA protection include Anthelios SX and Celazome 29. They are available in a few outlets, online, and at clinics.

And don't forget to re-apply sunscreen if your kids are skiing or playing in the snow, as it will get washed off.

5. Hydrate your body and environment.

- Hydrate your skin and body from the inside out by drinking lots of water and making sure your kids drink water as well – it's a great substitute for high-calorie sodas!
- Put moisture back into the air with a humidifying system. These are available in a variety of price ranges online and at most hardware stores.

About the author: Kateri DeLaney, R.N., B.S.N., is clinical director for the Sylvania Institute for Medical Aesthetics, LLC in Frederick, MD, 301-668-0002, www.sylvanainstitute.com. Sylvania offers many of the products mentioned in this article, as well as acne treatments and a variety of medical aesthetic services.