



# Winter Skin: Itch, Itch, Scratch, Scratch



with  
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Winter is nearly here, and although everyone is focusing every spare medically-concerned neuron on H1N1, there are in fact, a host of other seasonal problems that can trouble you over the next few months, and for me, one of the more bothersome yearly return visitors is my “winter itch” by which I don’t mean my urge to move to Maui every year when the rains return to Vancouver, but rather my annual “winter itch” in which patches of my skin become cracked and itchy largely because of the dryness engendered from living and working in over-heated and consequently over-dry spaces.

Dry, itchy “winter skin” can occur in anyone, but it’s especially common in people with pre-existing skin problems, as well as the elderly, and since dryness is the “root cause” (oh, what an over-used phrase) of this problem, it’s pretty easy to guess that the secret to controlling it is to re-moisturize the skin in several ways.

First, humidify the air in your home or office, especially rooms and spaces you occupy often, and try to keep the temperature down a bit (best tactic: get my wife to move in for a few days; she prefers – demands, actually - a frigid indoor environment).

Second, eliminate both super-hot and long baths and showers, which may sound like a counter-intuitive tactic because you always feel better immediately after a long, hot bath or shower, but that soaking actually dries the skin out more than if you had just left it alone.

Third, use moisturizers and although most skin specialists advice that you first try an oil-based moisturizer (it’s thick), you will likely have to do some trial-and-error testing to find the best moisturizer for your particular condition.

For the hands, here are a few more tips: wear gloves when going out because cold, dry air worsens the problem; if your gloves get wet, take them off and find a dry pair (doh!); and minimize hand-washing because the more you wash your hands, especially with drying soaps, the worse the problem gets, although since frequent hand-washing reduces the risk of catching many infections, on balance, you may decide – like I have - that it’s worth dealing with rough hands if it also reduces your risk of an H1N1 infection.

Finally, an issue that will surely get some people angry, but hey, I like email.



Thus, I have never seen a good study that shows that drinking lots of water improves your skin (nor, for that matter, that it helps with anything, except, of course, the revenue of water bottling companies).

In fact, there is no minimum amount of water that any of us needs to drink every day (where did that 8 glasses of water a day come from anyway?) and more contentiously, for proper hydration, all fluids are equivalent (except perhaps alcohol), so if you’re thirsty (and aside from special circumstances, that’s really the only reason you should be drinking) and you slake your thirst with coffee, for example, you are doing yourself just as much good (probably more) than if you drink a glass of water.

Let the emails begin.

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