

Hands on – keeping hands healthy this winter

Winter is harsh on your skin, but while we're all ahead of the game by now when it comes to protecting our face, our hands can still take quite a beating when the temperatures fall and the wind howls.

There's no escape from the onslaught indoors either as air-conditioned and over warm homes, shops and offices all conspire to dry out and damage the delicate skin of our hands. The combination of different factors at this time of year can leave the skin on your hands so dehydrated that they crack, peel, and even bleed.

So how can you protect your hands this winter?

Put up a barrier

Protecting your skin starts with a moisture-sealing barrier. Your skin's natural barrier is made up of proteins, lipids, and oils, and it usually works pretty well. If it's weakened it leaves you prone to skin conditions like eczema, and symptoms that include itching, inflammation and drying out.

The key is to stop it from losing moisture as much as possible in the first place, and replace any that you do lose regularly. This is where hand creams and treatments are essential – you need a physical barrier and to put the moisture back in topically – no amount of drinking water will hydrate skin that's been chapped by the wind or cold.

Start moisturizing before your hands start showing any signs of dryness, and for the best protection look for hand treatments that contain emollient and humectant ingredients. Your professional esthetician will be happy to advise you on a range that's suitable for you and the conditions you need it for.

Go in thick

Sometimes you need a little more support with dry skin, and if your hands are already seeing signs of winter damage, repair it with therapeutic products designed to nourish and soothe cracked, chapped and bleeding skin. Choose a thick, rich moisturizer that contains richer, soothing ingredients like shea and cocoa butter, dimethicone or beeswax. Ask your esthetician what she recommends. If you have eczema, or any other skin conditions that are exacerbated by cold, wet weather, you may also benefit from doctor's advice and medicated products. Slather on a thick layer of your chosen moisturizing product

at bedtime, pop on some cotton gloves and leave in overnight to soak in.

Watch how you wash

It's important not to let your skin dry out through frequent handwashing. You can keep your hands hydrated as well as clean if you opt for a mild hand wash or soap, stick to warm water (not too hot) and remember to apply hand cream as soon as you've dried off. If you work in a profession where you have to wash your hands repeatedly, or your skin is very dry, you could also try gel or hand wipes instead of soap and water as they won't dry your skin out as much.

Pop your gloves on

Mom was right; you need to wear gloves outside when the weather is bitter! Try to wear mitten or gloves outdoors as much as possible when it's cold or wet to protect skin from as much of the elements as possible. If you're wearing gloves and they get wet, apply your hand cream as soon as you can.

Looking after your skin through the winter can pay off in spades when you get to spring and can take your gloves off and show off that new manicure with pride!