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Combat Dry Skin

The colder weather of autumn and winter is upon us. While we can hide beneath layers of clothing, the elements still take their toll on our skin. Cold weather combined with the dry, windy conditions that are this province's signature can wreak havoc on skin, particularly if you're a fan of outdoor exercise. With a little TLC and some natural remedies, seasonal dry and chapped skin can be a thing of the past.

Skin 101

Skin is the body's largest organ. It not only shields us from the elements around us, it also assists with detoxification, and protects our tissues and organs from damage. Skin also reflects our inner health. It readily shows stress and tension, hormonal imbalances, and nutritional deficiencies. The best way to combat dry skin that accompanies the colder weather is by working from the inside out, rather than just slathering on creams and ointments and hoping for the best.

Water, Water Everywhere

One of the main components of healthy skin is water. The body is composed of over seventy percent water that makes up every cell, including skin cells. The first step toward preventing or healing dry skin is to increase your water consumption. This will help keep your skin properly hydrated. While the standard recommendation is eight cups per day, more may be required to cope with dry indoor air and harsh fall and winter elements outdoors. For every caffeinated or alcoholic beverage you drink, add another glass of water to the total.

Eat Your Fats

Before you start piling the French fries on your dinner plate, keep reading. To combat dryness, you will need to increase your consumption of healthy fats, also known as essential fatty acids. There are many different types of healthy fats, all of which are required to prevent dry skin and chapping. Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, and tuna are helpful. Adding cold-pressed flax or hemp oil to salads or drizzled on steamed veggies or baked potatoes is another excellent way to add healthy Omega-3 fatty acids to your diet.

Avoid cooking with flax or hemp oil since the heat eliminates any benefit to taking them. After cooking food, you can use these oils in place of butter as a condiment on foods. Most people are quite surprised to find that they actually taste quite good. If you are not among them, you can sneak some flax or hemp oil into a smoothie. Try to get two tablespoons of these oils per day.

Foods & Supplements

To prevent dryness and chapped skin, your body's needs for vitamins A, E, and D may be higher during the cold weather months. You can take these nutrients in supplement form but I recommend that you also try to eat foods high in these nutrients. Carrots, carrot juice, sweet potatoes, yams, and green leafy vegetables are excellent sources of vitamin A. Vitamin E is prevalent in raw, unsalted seeds and nuts such as pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, and whole grain cereals and breads. Vitamin D is made in the body when the skin is exposed to sunlight, however, that can be inadequate during the colder weather.

Excellent sources of vitamin D include sunflower seeds, sweet potatoes, fish, eggs, and sprouts.

From the Outside In

The best moisturizers to fend off dry skin are those that contain few harsh chemicals, emulsifiers, preservatives, and alcohol, all of which can further irritate dry skin. While many companies claim that their products are "natural" few actually live up to the claim.

An oil-based moisturizer is best, preferably one that contains vitamins A, E, or D. Pure, cold-pressed oils are also effective. You can find hazelnut, almond, apricot kernel, grape seed, avocado, and other pure oils in many natural food stores. You can also add pure essential oils. Here is my recipe for a soothing and moisturizing chapped skin ointment.

Michelle's Chapped Skin Ointment

In a small pot, over low heat on the stove, combine:

1 cup of pure (preferably organic), cold-pressed oil such as olive, almond, hazelnut, grape seed or avocado. My preferred blend is hazelnut and avocado combined in a ratio of approximately 8:1.

1 Tablespoon beeswax (available at many natural food stores)

10 drops of your favorite essential oils

30 drops of pure carrot essential oil (optional)

Slowly heat until the beeswax is melted. Do not let ingredients boil as this damages the integrity of the oils. It is best to work slowly. Whisk or stir ingredients to be sure they are blended and pour into glass moisturizer containers (many natural food stores sell these). Let sit until cool.

With a little extra attention you can prevent your skin from withering up during the colder months ahead. If you're already experiencing dry skin, you can turn it around with a little TLC, some healthy foods, extra water and some soothing natural moisturizers.