

Ask Dr. Mikell

By Dr. Oswald Mikell

Dr. Oswald Mikell, MD • Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry

American Board of Dermatology | American Board of Cosmetic Surgery | Physician of the Year 2008

Renew Winter Skin.

It's that time of year again! Time for itchy, flaky skin and dry cracked hands and lips. Symptoms can range from mildly annoying to excruciatingly painful. The good news is...you don't have to live with it!

Q: I have chapped lips all winter long. Is there anything I can do?

A: Here are a few tips that can help treat and prevent chapped lips:

- Protect your lips. Use an oil-based lubricating cream or lip balm containing petrolatum or beeswax. Before going out in cold, dry weather apply lip cream or balm that contains sunscreen. Avoid licking your lips. Saliva evaporates quickly, leaving lips drier than before you licked them.
- Breathe through your nose. If chapping is severe and doesn't respond to treatment at home, consult your doctor. Rarely, persistent chapped lips may indicate an underlying problem.

Q: My hands are dry and cracked. What can I do?

A: The skin on your hands is thinner than on most parts of the body and has fewer oil glands. That means it's harder to keep your hands moist, especially in cold, dry weather. This can lead to itchiness and cracking. Wear gloves when you go outside and stay moisturized.

Q: Will drinking more water help keep my skin hydrated?

A: While water is good for your overall health, the average person's skin does not reflect the amount of water they drink.

Q: What can I do about dry skin on my feet?

A: Minty foot lotions are great in the hot summer months, but during the winter, your feet need stronger stuff. Try finding lotions that contain petroleum jelly or glycerin instead. And use exfoliants to get the dead skin off periodically; this will help the moisturizer to sink in faster and deeper.

Q: What should I know about moisturizing for winter skin?

A: You should consider changing from your summer moisturizer to an "ointment" moisturizer that's oil-based, rather than water-based, as the oil will create a protective layer on the skin that retains more moisture than a cream or lotion. Look for "non-clogging" oils, like avocado oil, mineral oil, primrose oil, or almond oil. You can also look for lotions containing "humectants".

Dry skin during the winter months is something many people deal with. It may be unsightly and can itch or be painful. Very dry skin can even crack and be prone to infection. It's best to take steps to prevent your skin from drying out - when it starts to itch or feel dry, you should begin treatment so it won't get any worse. If you are experiencing dry skin symptoms - there's help both for your appearance and for your comfort. Call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 (Hilton Head) or (843) 705-0840 (Bluffton / Okatie) to schedule an appointment.