

How to Treat 5 Skin Care Concerns Dermatologists Tackle Every Winter

by Michelle Rostamian



Winter may be the alleged “most wonderful time of the year,” but when it comes to skincare, the season can mean a whole host of issues. While dermatologists were busy treating summer acne and prickly heat during the warm-weather months, winter is all about navigating a moisture-less environment and skin sensitivity. If dipping temps have your skin feeling out of sorts, you’re not alone. Here are five of the most common skincare concerns dermatologists say they treat every winter, and how to handle them.

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spring / summer 2022 limited edition

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UV-Related Damage

Protecting your skin from the sun isn’t just reserved for summer days spent on the beach. It’s equally as important to keep your skin shielded during the winter months, too, as experts say UV-related damage can still occur during chilling temps. “The ozone layer is the part of the atmosphere that absorbs radiation from the sun, and it’s actually thinner during the winter months, so you are, in fact, less protected from UV radiation,” says [Dr. Rachel Maiman](#), a dermatologist at [Marmur Medical](#). “This is coupled with the fact that the sun’s rays can be equally—if not more—damaging in the winter due to its reflection off of snow and ice.”

Sun-related damage (read: rough, dull texture, sagging skin, and uneven pigmentation) is

cumulative, and this buildup over time can lead to visible changes in the skin. The best measure here is preventative—your winter skincare routine should still include a water-resistant SPF of at least 30. If you're noticing signs of photoaging (which Maiman says can be flat, brown sun spots, freckling, loss of elasticity and volume, or rough, uneven skin texture), retinol products, chemical peels, and laser treatments can be helpful.

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Dandruff

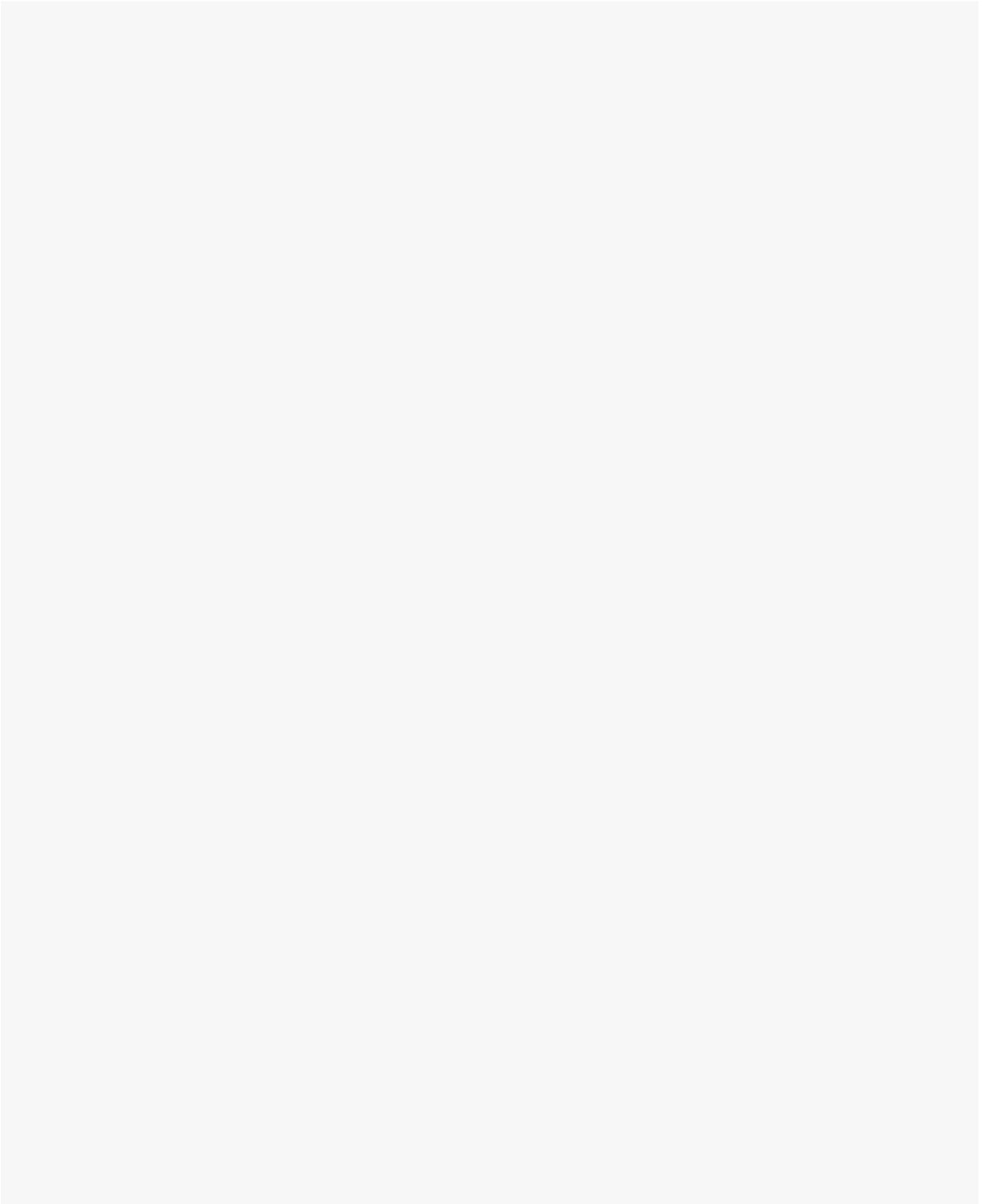
Dandruff, medically referred to as seborrheic dermatitis, can rear its head all year round, but it particularly loves to make an appearance when the forces of cold, dry winter air and overheated indoor spaces merge. “This can upset moisture balance in the skin, which can trigger an imbalance in the normal levels of yeast on the scalp,” says Maiman. And, as Dr. Nancy Samolitis, a dermatologist and co-founder of the beauty brand Facile adds, the loose white flaking can cause itchiness, redness, and flaking. “Dandruff most commonly occurs on the scalp, in particular behind the ears and at the hairline, but can also occur on the face around the eyebrows, the creases of the nose, and the beard area in men,” Samolitis says.

While dandruff can be a nuisance to treat, you have options when it comes to nixing it. If your condition is mild, Maiman says over-the-counter shampoos formulated with anti-yeast ingredients like selenium sulfide can help, as can those containing salicylic acid, which help break down the crust and flakes associated with the condition. When all else fails, your dermatologist may prescribe an anti-yeast or anti-inflammatory shampoo, which can be used alone or in conjunction with anti-inflammatory topicals, Maiman adds.

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Eczema

“Eczema is the umbrella term used for a group of conditions that cause the skin to become itchy, inflamed, red, and flaky,” Maiman. “Patients with a known history of childhood eczema, called atopic dermatitis, are generally more prone to eczema of all kinds, as are people with inherently dry skin.” The root cause of eczema in the wintertime is—you guessed it—drier skin as a result of a moisture-less environment. According to Maiman, wintertime eczema flare-ups tend to appear on the hands (by way of exposure to potential irritants and allergens), the eyelids (because skin is so thin that it has a greater propensity to develop irritation), and the lips (because the lips lack sebaceous glands that produce naturally hydrating oils).

While severe forms of eczema may warrant a visit to your derm, Samolitis notes that emollient moisturizers can create a barrier on your skin to trap in water, which can help treat and prevent eczema. Dermatologist and Docent medical advisor Dr. Farhaad Riyaz also recommends running a humidifier in your room to add moisture to arid winter air as well as taking shorter, lukewarm showers to keep dry winter skin in check.

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Keratosis Pilaris

That angry, red goosebump-looking irritation on your skin? It's likely keratosis pilaris, a common skin condition that occurs when the body produces an excess of keratin. "Keratin is a natural protein, but when produced in excess, it surrounds and traps the hair follicle, resulting in a small, rough, hardened plug," explains Riyaz. "These plugs appear as rough, white or reddish bumps, typically on the upper arms, back of the legs, buttocks, sides, and even the face." They're likely to flare up in the wintertime due to the same reasons as eczema—weakened

They're likely to flare up in the winter due to the same reasons as eczema — weakened moisture barrier and a general lack of moisture in the air coupled with the dry air emitted by heaters and long, hot showers.

To help treat keratosis pilaris, Riyaz recommends seeking out cleansers, creams, and scrubs that contain keratolytic agents that break down keratin, such as salicylic acid and glycolic acid. “Urea is another great ingredient because it is both a keratolytic and humectant, meaning it hydrates by drawing water from the lower layers of the skin to the more superficial layers.”

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Contact Dermatitis

If you've ever tried out a new skincare product only to be met with itchiness, inflammation, and burning, you're likely experiencing contact dermatitis, or an allergic reaction. According to Samolitis, some of the most common allergens include metals, preservatives in skincare products, fragrances, and topical antibiotics. Also, dryer weather in the winter can lead to increased water loss in the skin, therefore compromising the epidermal barrier—meaning, your skin is more sensitive in the wintertime. “This may lead to an increased risk of contact dermatitis in some people who are genetically prone to that and other allergies,” says Samolitis.

If your skin already skews sensitive, avoid products that contain common irritants (like synthetic fragrances and preservatives), load up on barrier-supporting ingredients like niacinamide, amino acids, and peptides, choose moisturizers with humectant and emollient ingredients such as hyaluronic acid, glycerin, urea, dimethicone, petrolatum, and mineral oil, and take conservative measures like wearing gloves when cleaning and applying moisturizer after hand washing.

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