

Caring for eczema during winter

A child's skin is very susceptible temperature extremes and needs time to adapt from a summer to a winter skin. If winter makes the eczema flare, here are ten top tips to minimise the impact:

1. **Moisturize the skin frequently.** A heavier emollient/ moisturiser can help to protect the skin, especially those areas like the face and hands that are exposed to the harsh weather.
2. **Protect the hands.** Washing our hands several times a day quickly washes away our natural protective skin oils. In order to retain more moisture, avoid using excessively hot water for hand washing. Also, apply hand cream after every washing to prevent chapping and cracking, which can lead to bleeding where the knuckles and fingers bend. Encourage glove wearing for outdoors to protect hands from wind and cold damage. Make sure the gloves are made from materials that don't irritate the skin.
3. **Warm rather than hot showers.** When it's cold, we have a tendency to want to take a long, relaxing, hot bath or shower. But, remember, hot water dries out the skin by stripping its natural oils. Just as when washing hands, use warm or lukewarm water when bathing. Furthermore, keep shower time short in winter - no more than 10 minutes - and only once within a 24-hour period in order to retain the most moisture. Remember to apply moisturisers after showering so that the water is trapped in your skin to keep it supple.
4. **Turn down the heat.** Hot air is drier than cool air. So, don't crank up the heat too much when it's cold outside. Instead, try setting your thermostat at a cool, yet comfortable temperature of around 20 degrees centigrade to prevent skin from losing moisture.

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, Dr Ruth Murphy, Dr Jane Ravenscroft, Nurse Consultant Sandra Lawton and parents on behalf of the Nottingham Support Group for Carers of Children with Eczema

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5. **Bundle up.** Wear the appropriate clothing for the temperature and dress in layers. Wear soft, breathable materials against your skin and then pull on a warm sweater. Wearing layers allows clothing to be removed as needed to prevent overheating, which can trigger a scratch/itch cycle. Avoid direct contact with wool or nylon, which can be very irritating for people with eczema. The layers in direct contact with the skin should be given an extra rinse cycle when washing, as laundry detergent or conditioner can equally be irritating. Make sure there are no scratchy labels inside the clothing next to the skin.
6. **Indoor time.** Spending more time indoors can mean more problems with dust mites, pet dander, cigarette smoke, gas fumes and household sprays and chemicals, any of which can trigger eczema symptoms. Mould and dust mites thrive in humidity, so keep indoor humidity level below 35 percent. If your eczema is clearly worsened with pet contact, avoid or minimize being in households with pets if possible.
7. **Playtime outside.** First frost kills most moulds outdoors. Even so, keep children from playing in areas that mould prefers, such as dark, damp wooded areas and piles of fallen leaves.
8. **Shampoo.** A recent study undertaken by the Nottingham team found that shampoo exposure may be associated with eczema worsening and is more pronounced in cold weather.
9. **Use sunscreen.** Yes, even in winter on sunny days or if on holidays in snowy areas. Apply a sunscreen with a SPF of 30, and apply lip balm to protect the lips. Most include sunscreen, but check the label to be sure before purchasing the lip balm.
10. **Stick to your skincare routine.** With shortening days it can be difficult to get your child up in the morning whilst it is dark – but still make time to apply their creams ready for the day ahead.

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