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# Protecting Senior Skin from Winter Weather Damage

By [Anne-Marie Botek](#), December 18, 2012



Contrary to the popular jingle, Jack Frost doesn't just nip—he often bites. And, far from attacking just your nose, he targets the largest organ you possess—your skin.

The bitter cold and blistering winds of winter can quickly strip skin of its moisture, leaving it prone to itching, cracking and bleeding. Broken skin is a recipe for infection, says **Rebecca Baxt, M.D.**, a board certified dermatologist and fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology.

Even the welcoming warmth of a climate-controlled building adds to your skin's suffering. According to James C. Marotta, a Long Island-based facial plastic surgeon, the same heating system that keeps your house toasty also sucks much of the moisture out of the air.

## Seniors more susceptible to skin problems

Seniors are particularly prone to skin issues. Over time, a person's skin becomes thinner, drier and more fragile.

[Shingles](#) and senile purpura—skin that bruises easily—are two ailments that often strike the elderly, regardless of the season.

According to Baxt, winter weather further compounds these problems, making a senior more prone to itchy skin and certain types of rashes, including:

- **Eczema craquele (xerosis)** is an itchy rash that seniors sometimes develop, typically on their legs and arms.
- **Seborrheic dermatitis**, a condition marked by patches of itchy, flaky skin, typically in oily areas such as the scalp, eyebrows, nose and chest is also worsened by winter weather. According to Baxt the yeast that causes this type of skin malady thrives in frosty, moisture-free climates.

### **Six skin-saving strategies**

Baxt and Marotta offer six essential cold-weather skin protection tips:

1. **Make sure to moisturize:** There's no better cure for winter skin woes than a bottle of your go-to moisturizer. "It's critical that people, especially elderly people, moisturize their skin in the winter months, says Baxt, who suggests applying moisturizer immediately after showering. She also says that, while lotion may provide enough protection for some people, seniors might want to seek out heavier creams or ointments. Just be sure to check the ingredients. Many heavy-duty moisturizers contain lanolin—a common allergen for the elderly. Vaseline petroleum jelly can be a skin saver—if you can get over the greasiness. Marotta offers the following tip for making moisturizers more effective: after application, immediately cover the area with clothing (i.e. pants, shirt, gloves, socks) to enhance absorption and prevent evaporation.
2. **Don't forget to drink:** By the time December rolls around, sweat-inducing temperatures may seem like a distant memory, but don't assume that cooler weather means you can skimp on hydration. Keep your fluid consumption consistent—Marotta suggests sticking to eight glasses of water a day. One way to know if you're getting enough water is to check your urine color. Unless you're on certain medications that may affect your urine hues, aim for shades that lie somewhere in the range of pale-to-moderately-yellow.
3. **Bundle up:** Before braving the frigid outdoors, be sure to cover as much exposed skin as you possibly can. The skin on your fingers and toes is particularly susceptible to frostbite and windburn.
4. **Remember your sunscreen:** It may be a summertime staple, but according to Baxt, sunscreen is essential during cloudless winter days—especially if there's sun-reflecting snow on the ground.

5. **Keep showers short:** As satisfying as a steamy shower can be on a cold winter's night, Marotta warns that basking in too much scalding water can strip your skin of much of its moisture.
  
6. **Crank up the humidity:** Full room humidifiers can help re-infuse dry, artificially-heated air with some much-needed moisture.