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Winter Rays

Protect yourself from the sun's radiation this season



"Everyone needs to protect their skin, especially on cold, sunny days, with the sun reflecting off the snow."

DR. REBECCA BAXT

BY RYAN GREENE

Whether you go skiing, surfing or snowboarding, protecting your skin during the winter is just as important as during the summer.

Most of us pack up the sunscreen with our bathing suits. But Rebecca Baxt, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at New York University who practices at Baxt CosMedical in Paramus, says we shouldn't be fooled by changing seasons — the sun is around all year long.

"People think it's cold, so you don't have to use sunscreen," Baxt says. "Everyone needs to protect their skin, especially on cold, sunny days, with the sun reflecting off the snow."

The primary danger lies in forgetting about the sun's radiation. UVA and UVB rays, which are powerful enough to travel through clouds, continue to affect us throughout the year. So as chilly as sledding might be, your skin is at least as vulnerable to damage as ever. The risk of cancer, sun spots and wrinkles doesn't disappear with the summer heat.

"A lot of people will never put on sunscreen unless they're at the beach," Baxt says. "You can feel silly about it, but sunscreen protects against all sorts of things."

Baxt recommends that anyone planning to spend an appreciable amount of time outdoors, especially skiers, apply sunscreen every hour or two. Choose a broad-spectrum variety with an SPF of 30 or higher. A moisturizer with sufficient SPF could work, too.

Moisturizing also protects the skin against other weather damage. The cold, dry air and wind in the winter months can dry out the skin, and the dry heat of central heating doesn't help. If the skin gets too dry, it can flake, itch and even crack.

"When your skin breaks down like that," Baxt says, "it becomes susceptible to infection."

She suggests moisturizing at least once daily, especially right after showering. Basic moisturizing lotion should suffice for most, but people with especially dry skin might have to upgrade to cream or ointment, which are more powerful than lotion.

"People tend not to like ointments," Baxt says, "because they're oily. But they really are the best moisturizers. Vaseline petroleum jelly is the cheapest, best moisturizer out there." ■



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