



An Educated Minute

from the Human Resources Department

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Winter Itch

Changes in the weather, within any season, can cause even mild skin irritations to become more painful and symptoms more severe. Eczema, known in the colder months as the *Winter Itch*, can be especially frustrating as a drop in the temperature can cause skin to feel more dry and irritated. Mild sufferers may experience symptoms of redness and itching. In worse cases, the skin can become scaly or discoloured, prone to cracking and bleeding sores when left untreated.

According to the Director of Dermatology at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, more than one million Canadians suffer from eczema. The incidence of eczema has nearly tripled since 1970.

“This condition can have a profound effect on a child or adults quality of life. Some types of eczema can also present sufferers with asthma, and environmental allergies. “While (eczema) can occur year-round, it may be exaggerated in the winter, as conditions are affected by environmental factors.”

Reactions caused by eczema are also brought on, more commonly, by exposure to chemicals found in harsh soaps and reactions to some synthetic fabrics. During the colder months these reactions become more frequent as we wash our hands more often and protect our bodies from the cold using scarves, gloves and hats, commonly made from wool. When we layer clothing, as a shield from cold air, we may be contributing to the problem by irritating our skin even more. Our bodies will naturally create excess heat and moisture when bundled up using these fabrics that can irritate sensitive skin.

Avoiding severe symptoms of eczema during winter months could be as simple as:

- Applying an effective unscented and hypoallergenic moisturizer immediately after bathing and/or handwashing.
- Towel-dry skin by patting and avoid rubbing.
- Avoid snug or irritating fabrics. Cotton clothing will keep your body warm and allow skin to breathe by absorbing sweat instead of additional moisture building on your skin.



If you've taken precautions, yet still have an unbearable itch, it may be time to visit your family doctor or dermatologist. They can give you a prescription to control more severe cases of the winter itch.



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