



Dealing with Dry Winter Air

Curling up in front of a roaring fire while watching a white, fluffy blanket of snow coat the ground outside gives the winter season a magical air, but the cold air seeping in from that lovely winter scene can be absolutely brutal. Dry winter air leeches moisture, leaving your skin as dry and cracked as a salt flat and your sinuses as parched as the Sahara in summer. Dry air also contributes to that jarring static shock that practically propels you across the room every time you pet the cat.

Here are a few tips to help you combat dry indoor air, preserve the moisture in your skin and nasal passages, and avoid feline-induced static shocks this winter.

Winter Drought

There's a reason why you get so sweaty in the summer, and it's not just from the heat. Warmer air holds more moisture than cooler air. In the winter, the cold air that seeps into your home from the outside has a lower humidity -- meaning that it carries very little moisture. You crank up the heat inside your house, which adds warmth but doesn't increase the amount of moisture in the air. Because wintertime humidity is so low, what little moisture that is around is quickly sucked up into the air. Moisture also evaporates from your body, leaving your skin, nose, and throat parched.

Scorched Sinuses

Cold, dry air pulls moisture from your mouth and nose, leaving your nasal passages dried out and your throat dry. Dry nostrils are more likely to crack and give you a nosebleed. Because your nose needs gooey mucus to trap viruses and other icky invaders before they can get you sick, dry nostrils can also make you more vulnerable to colds, sinus infections, and the flu. That's especially a problem in winter, when bacteria and viruses can tend to linger longer in the dry air after someone coughs or sneezes.

When you turn up the thermostat in your home, your heating system kicks up clouds of dust, pollen, and other allergens that can inflame your sinuses. Cold, dry air plus those allergens can also irritate your airways. For some people with asthma, cold and dry air can lead to a narrowing of breathing passages and trigger an attack.

Thirsty Skin

Cold air sucks out skin's moisture, which is why young, smooth hands can look older in the winter months. Taking hot showers can worsen dry, itchy skin by removing the natural layer of oil that preserves and protects the skin's moisture. Your lips also take a beating in the winter. The cold wind outside, combined with the dry air inside can leave you with dry, chapped lips.

Rehydrate

- Use a humidifier. Running a humidifier in your home will add moisture to dry, heated air. The moist air will help keep your skin, mouth, and nose lubricated, and helps prevent those nasty static shocks. Your goal is to aim for a comfortable home humidity level of between 30% and 50%. Don't crank up the humidifier higher than that, though, or you could develop another problem -- mold, fungi, dust mites, and other tiny critters. Make sure to keep your humidifier clean so that it doesn't send dust and germs spewing into your house.
- Seal your home. Prevent the cold, dry air outside from paying you an unwelcome visit. Insulate your home so you don't have to turn up the heat. Close any air leaks in doors, windows, attics, and crawl spaces with caulk, spray foam, or weather stripping. Sealing off air leaks will also help you save money on your monthly heating bill, because you'll feel warm and cozy enough to turn down the thermostat a few notches.
- Hydrate often. Keep your skin and mouth moist by drinking water throughout the day. Don't like water? Try putting in a little tea or juice to add flavor.

- Shorten your showers. Long, hot showers might feel great on frigid winter mornings, but the heat and steam can really dry out your skin. Turn the water temperature down to warm -- not hot -- and use a gentle soap. Get out as soon as you're clean, or under 15 minutes, whichever comes first.
- Moisturize. Rub a thick oil-based moisturizer onto your skin frequently each day, especially after you take a shower or bath. The oil in the product will lock moisture into your skin and keep it from drying out. Moisturizers come in different forms, but ointments will provide the most protection for dry skin. Make sure to apply moisturizing sunscreen with SPF 30 to exposed skin before going outside. Also apply a lip balm or petroleum jelly to protect against chapped lips. Help keep your nasal passageways moist by using salt water (saline) drops or rubbing a little petroleum jelly into each nostril gently with a cotton swab.

Source: <http://www.webmd.com/women/home-health-and-safety-9/dry-indoor-air?page=2>

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