

Tips on Caring for the Body's Largest Organ

By Dr. Christina Bolante



It may seem odd to some that a young girl from Forks, WA, the rainiest town in the contiguous United States, grew up to be a dermatologist.

But at age five, our family moved from the Olympic Peninsula to Lynden, WA known for dairy farms, berry farms and high school sports.

Growing up in a farming community, I spent my summers working on a berry farm and competing on the softball diamond. I quickly understood the utility of sunscreen and that a covered dugout was a luxury. When it came time to name my dermatology practice, I landed on the word parasol (in Latin para for "shield" and sol for "sun"). Parasol embodies a sense of comfort and

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respite against the elements, but is also a subtle nod to my Pacific Northwest upbringing where umbrellas are ubiquitous. We see kids for warts and acne, patients with eczema and psoriasis patients with skin cancers, grandparents with thinning skin and wounds, and those who want cosmetic improvements. Just as the seasons change and the crops rotate, the skin evolves over time. As we head into the autumn months and daylight hours dwindle, it is still an important time to care for our skin.

Many of my local patients are unaware that our mild weather does not necessarily protect them from sun-damaged skin.

Approximately 70 percent of American adults do not shield themselves from the dangerous rays when outside. Ultraviolet (UV) rays, not the temperature, damage our skin — and clouds do not effectively block UV rays. The USDA reports that up to 80 percent of UV rays can penetrate through clouds, and 85 percent can reflect off of sand, concrete, water and snow.

Sixty percent of daily UV "B" (UVB) reaches the Earth's surface between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. While it is best to avoid the sun during these peak hours, it is not always feasible when working in agriculture. This is why it is vital to apply an SPF 30 or greater daily in any kind of weather. Sunscreen protects against ultraviolet rays that lead to premature aging of the skin and skin cancers.

According to the Skin Cancer Foundation:

- One in five Americans will develop skin cancer by the age of 70
- More than two people in the U.S. die of skin cancer every hour
- Having more than five sunburns doubles your melanoma risk
- Squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma are the two most common types of skin cancer
- Melanoma is the deadliest skin cancer, but highly treatable if detected early

While the sun can cause the most obvious damage, the changing seasons can have a dramatic effect on our skin. Changes in weather — both hot and cold — can irritate skin, making existing conditions worse and

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causing new ones to surface. Generally, fall begins with pleasant temperatures, bringing people outside for festivals and sporting events, and then ushers in cooler weather. This cold — combined with the increased use of central heating inside — draws moisture from the air and also from your skin. These temperature changes don't just require a new wardrobe; they also require some new daily skin-care practices. Steps we take during the fall to protect and moisturize your skin will help prepare skin for the colder, harsher winter months.

Learn how to enjoy some of the year's best weather while protecting your skin with these fall skin care tips:

- Wash your face every day with a gentle cleanser.
- Make sure to get a good night's sleep (7-9 hours) and exercise regularly
- Stay hydrated by drinking water regularly and watch your alcohol intake. Water flushes out toxins, reduces puffiness around the eyes, and makes wrinkles less visible. Alcohol does the opposite.
- Lather on a heavier lotion or skin cream after showers, use a lip balm with SPF protection and wear sunscreen while doing outdoor sports.
- Perform monthly self-skin exams to look for changes to moles and spots with unusual shapes or colors.
- Use a thick hand cream. Not only are your hands drier in cooler temperatures, but frequent hand-washing seen during the pandemic leaves skin even drier throughout the day. After washing your hands, use a thick moisturizing cream to rebuild a barrier on your skin that will help your hands retain moisture.
- Eat healthy. Some of the season's most enjoyable traditions can lead to some suspect eating habits. Tailgating, trick-or-treating and other holiday celebrations can lead to a sharp increase in processed foods. Foods high in refined carbs and those with a high glycemic index can cause sugars and hormones to spike, which can worsen acne and other skin conditions.
- Dress for the elements. As the weather becomes colder, long sleeves, scarves, and gloves can help protect your skin from drying elements. Generally, polyester, nylon, wool, silk, and denim provide the most UV blockage, and darker-colored fabrics absorb more UV rays than lighter colors, but SPF rated clothing provides the best coverage

While there are some valuable things we can do to protect our skin, making regular visits to a dermatologist remains the most important step in maintaining skin health. Make an appointment at an office today, and begin to love the skin you're in. ☺