

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness Program, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is no stranger to our show. Mary Bressler is an NP, specializing in dermatology at Lake Region Healthcare. Good morning, Mary. Thanks for joining us again.

Mary Bressler: Hi, Katie. I guess welcome back.

Katie Johnson: Yes, welcome back. It's winter in Minnesota and a good time to reflect on the beauty of the cold weather. There are so many nice things about winter and snow and the quiet of the season, but it's also a season that can be really harsh, particularly on our skin. We want to talk about some cold weather precautions today, but first let's just remind our listeners who maybe don't know you who you are, what you do at Lake Region, how long you've been here, and what kind of your specialty areas are.

Mary Bressler: I'm a family nurse practitioner with a specialty in dermatology. I've been here about five years, and I've been a very busy practitioner here. I see all spectrums of dermatology care. Right now I'm really busy with skin cancer screening and things like that, but I have a big practice also in dermatology issues as eczema, psoriasis, dry skin issues, acne, kind of I'm full spectrum for dermatology.

Katie Johnson: And like you said, definitely filling a need here based on how busy your practice is. When we talk about winter skincare, I wonder first of all why is it that winter is so much harsher on our skin than summer weather?

Mary Bressler: Our humidity is so much lower and that causes our skin to be so much drier, and it's very frustrating for people who live in the north land. You can almost see it start happening as early as October. And I know even with myself with my skin, the first thing I want to do is start hydrating. And I give a dry skincare handout to almost all my patients, and it usually starts mid-October, and there's just some real basic things that you can kind of get ready before even December, like right now where it's really hitting a lot of people, the dry skin situation.

Katie Johnson: Well, we were talking before the show. You're going to share that handout with me and we'll post it along with this broadcast so that people can have that resource at their fingertips, and we really appreciate that. With that swing in humidity, we do have to change the way we care for our skin from season to season. I'm wondering if you have some specific skincare products or regimens that you recommend that can address both dry skin and oily skin as we think about how that need to change our skincare happens in this season.

Mary Bressler: What I usually will do when I am talking to patients about winter skincare or the winter itch, I'll ask them how often they shower, and our athletes sometimes are showering two to three times a day. And I'll tell them, "You know what? If you have to get into the shower, pick your shower time. Don't take a shower in

the morning to wake up if you have really dry skin. Maybe splashing water on your face to wake you up is all that you really need."

Then to make sure that you're only using soaps appropriately. You don't need to be soaping your whole body unless you're obviously dirty. A mechanic probably needs to be soaping their body in its entirety if they're getting really dirty. But otherwise really just your armpit area and your genital area if you are not an individual that is obviously dirty.

That is really hard for us clean freaks in Minnesota to think about. They many times will look at me like I'm losing a screw. And I will oftentimes tell them to use products like Dove soap. I just had a patient yesterday tell me they use Dawn soap for a full body wash. No wonder they're really dry.

Katie Johnson: Oh, my goodness. Yeah.

Mary Bressler: Then I'll take them to take a short shower and a short shower would probably be no longer than five minutes. And I know I raised a teenager and her showers were 15 minutes. So if she's taking two showers at 15 minutes each a day, already we're really struggling with the dry skin issue.

Then when you get out of the shower, get that lotion on or cream on. And I really educate patients on how to pick a lotion. This isn't really true, but it really brings home the fact on how to pick out a lotion. When you pick out a lotion, because everyone uses the word lotion, but a lotion, think water. Water evaporates really easy. When you pick out a lotion, it's better than nothing, and lotions are good on the face because they don't feel so thick and stuff.

Katie Johnson: Sure.

Mary Bressler: But if you have a dry skin issue, go to a cream because you have more oil in it than water, and if you are really, really dry, then go to something thick, where there's more oil than water, so then go to an ointment.

What I will usually do ... you'll know my trick now if you come in ... when patients say they're using a lotion, I'll say, "Okay. Let's talk about your lotion. Is it really a lotion or is it a cream?" And most of the time they're using a lotion. And I'll say, "Okay, good job. Now I want you to start using a cream." Maybe by just adding a cream, they'll get more benefit. And then if they have really dry skin, I'll say, "You know what? Just for winter months, why don't you try not using any fragrance in your product." Sometimes it's not the fragrance that's causing the trouble, but maybe you're a little dry and you're using a laundry detergent that's got some fragrance, and you're just a little bit more sensitive, so staying out of the fragrant products during winter months might be of benefit.

I really am a strong advocate of the product Vanicream. It's made by the Mayo Clinic. It comes in a pound jar. You can squirt it. Even though it's a cream, it goes on relatively nice. I'm going to change the rules here. Aveeno lotion is very good. It has a generic right next to it, and because it's a lotion, it feels like a cream. So I'm breaking the rule there.

Katie Johnson: Oh, interesting.

Mary Bressler: But that's a good product to use, too. And then of course, we all know about Vaseline. Vaseline is really good for very problematic areas. Olive oil is good for those who really can't afford things. If you really can't afford things, Crisco is good, but I've never used it in my practice, but it's written in all the literature.

Katie Johnson: Hmm, interesting.

Mary Bressler: Limiting the showers. If you're one of those people that's a clean freak, no bubble baths or anything like that, but get into the tub and lay there for 20 minutes. That's okay because you're getting soggy. Then get out and get those creams on, because your body is just waiting for it to be absorbed.

Katie Johnson: Sure.

Mary Bressler: There is my dry skincare handout.

Katie Johnson: Boy, that is fantastic. One other skincare product that maybe sometimes get overlooked in the winter is sunscreen, but it's important to keep in mind in the winter, too.

Mary Bressler: Very much so. Sunscreen needs to be used as much as during the summer months. Those snowmobilers, the downhill skiers, cross country skiers can really, really burn themselves. My daughter had a significant burn with snowmobiling one winter. It was on her lateral neck and was just because she didn't wear her sunscreen. Remember those of you who listened to me before, it's SP30 every two hours, and be careful with the sprays. You got to be able to see it on your skin and rub it in. You should be having your sunscreen available year round.

Katie Johnson: Definitely. Beyond winter skincare, we can talk about exposure to cold. That can be a problem, too. How do we prevent that, recognize it, and treat frostbite? I'm assuming you see that occasionally.

Mary Bressler: Yeah, I don't see it as much as probably the urgent care and the emergency room, but I do get a case of what's called chilblains about once or twice a year. And that's where people will have very, very, very cold toes and they get sores on them, and they just can't figure out what's going on. And the thing is, is they have a circulatory problem, but this can be used for anybody who wants to practice prevention, so you don't get frostbite.

You should be wearing warm boots, and in those boots, you should be wearing good socks. And a lot of us are wearing cotton socks because we think that when we sweat, it will absorb the sweat, which is true, but what happens is then it will hold onto the sweat. I'm a real strong proponent of getting expensive socks. Smartwool is a really good brand, Bridgedale. You can go online and you can get into sock programs that make them very affordable.

By the way, Smartwool now, if you wreck your Smartwool sock, you can return them and you get a free exchange. That's a new program that's just out there. But I've got a pair of Smartwool socks that I've had for seven years, and I'm still wearing them. And yes, I paid 20 bucks for them, but you really get your money's worth out of them. But wearing a good sock in a good boot will really do a lot of prevention, and more than likely you are not going to get frostbite.

If you get frostbite or you feel like your feet are very, very cold, usually we'll look at them and see that they are pale, possibly blisters there. The first thing you do is not rub them. A lot of people want to do the rubbing, and the best thing to do is to just lightly ... just leave them alone and let them heal or let them rewarm on their own. And oftentimes, those blisters, you just have to make sure that they don't get infected and make sure that you can feel. If you can't feel the toes, then it's important that you seek medical attention.

Very rarely do you have to actually be seen in an emergency room for frostbite, and the reason for that, you're probably being brought in for other reasons because you've been having exposure for other reasons. What usually will happen is that people start rubbing really, really aggressively, and then they open up their blisters and they really hurt, and then they have their secondary side effects.

Katie Johnson: Sure. As parents, oftentimes we're worried about our kids and their exposure in cold weather, because they just don't seem to have the same feelings we do, and forgetting to put a hat on or put gloves on is common. What can we do to inspire our kid to think about cold weather safety?

Mary Bressler: Well, one thing I would do ... I know it's easier said than done ... is give them consequences. But, we lose a lot of heat through our head, and hydration is very important during winter months. But one thing I always do every year when I was raising children is buy a hat they like. That solves a big chunk of the problem. And so that takes care of a big chunk of it.

The other thing is really educating from early on. Don't wait until they're in 10th grade to start preaching about sunscreen, wearing hats, wearing helmets and things like that when they're skiing. And then the other thing is we need to be good role models. We can't expect our children to be wearing sunscreen, wearing a hat when skiing or biking if we're not doing it. I think we need to be really good role models for that.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, great advice. You mentioned hydration. That's another big one, right? To take care of our skin, we need to be giving our bodies water.

Mary Bressler: Very much so. And I think we can lose just as much water during winter months as during summer months with certain types of activities. The thing about it is we don't know that we're actually losing it, and especially any of us who have spent time in the mountains and stuff, we don't even know that we're so dehydrated. Usually it's our taste buds that will tell us that. Yeah, it's important to hydrate.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, for sure. Any other advice you'd like to share with our listeners for winter months and skincare before we wrap up today?

Mary Bressler: No. I just really encourage if you are someone who sweats, that you really layer, because you can lose a lot of moisture that way, and when you sweat you really dry out, and that's just kind of a vicious circle, as well. I think really a lot of people have issues during winter months in comparison to summer months.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, it is definitely a common problem. Your advice today will certainly be helpful and we will post that winter skincare handout that you have, along with this broadcast today for our listeners, as well. Thank you for sharing your expertise with us. As always, Mary Bressler, NP with a dermatology specialty, my guest today, talking winter skincare on Apple a Day. Thanks, Mary.

Mary Bressler: You're very welcome.

Katie Johnson: Mary Bressler and Katie Johnson both remind you there is so much to do here. Take care of your skin and stay healthy for it. Have a great day.