

From cracks to wounds: Winter skin care is important

Becki Walz, PA

OSF HealthCare primary care provider

"In the winter, the air becomes cool and dry. It pulls all the moisture out of the air, which then pulls moisture out of your skin. That can disrupt the skin barrier. When your skin gets really dry, it can become flaky and itchy. As this gets worse, you can develop cracks that are painful and can bleed. More importantly when your skin starts to crack, it creates an opening for bacteria. It can lead to infections." (:38)

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"The wound is causing pain or has drainage. You notice swelling, redness or warmth. Those are all signs you could possibly have an infection." (:14)

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"I'm also going to want to know how the skin changed from when you first started having symptoms to now. Did the skin just look dry before, and now you have redness or an open wound? Was it itchy, and now it's just painful?" (:17)

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"Different diseases have different courses [in other words, how they progress]. Once you start itching the skin or putting things on it, it can change how the wound looks. So it's important we know what it looked like at the beginning before anything else happened to the area." (:14)

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"When you get out of the shower, you want to pat your skin dry. Don't rub it dry. Then while your skin is still a little bit damp, that's the best time to put on the moisturizer. It will help lock in that moisture to your skin. If you let your skin completely dry, it lets all the moisture evaporate." (:22)

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"The elevation in blood sugar causes damage to the blood vessels, and that causes decreased circulation. There are less oxygen and nutrients being delivered to a wound. Those are things the wound needs to heal and fight off infections. People with diabetes can develop neuropathy [which brings decreased sensation], especially in the feet. If they were to step on something and injure their foot or develop a wound, they might not always feel it. Sometimes by the time they notice, it's already progressing and getting a lot worse." (:43)

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"If you're outside for a long period and your feet feel cold, it's really important that when you come inside, you're careful about how you warm your feet. We don't want to use a heating pad, a space heater or really hot water because of the possible reduced sensation. So it's possible they could be burning their feet, and they wouldn't know." (:33)

