

# Keeping your Child's Winter Dry Skin in Check: Tips From Pediatric Dermatologist Dr. Sheilagh Maguiness

By Ronda S. Farah, MD

Soothing dry skin can be difficult, especially for children. Dry skin can cause itching, bleeding, and even a rash. Winter weather can make it more difficult to manage. As an expert in pediatric dermatology and eczema, Dr. Sheilagh Maguiness, Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota, gives us insight into the management of dry skin during an interview with Dr. Ronda Farah, Assistant Professor of Dermatology and Director of the M Health Cosmetic Center Dermatology, University of Minnesota.

## What are your top 3 tips for dry winter skin?

**Dr. Maguiness:** During dry winter months taking a bath rather than a shower can be more hydrating for your skin, especially when you seal the skin after bathing with a thick moisturizing cream.

When choosing a moisturizing cream, remember there is a difference between a lotion, cream and ointment. For children under 12 months of age, an ointment is often the best choice, such as Vaseline® or Aquaphor® due to their ability to form a protective barrier and help the skin retain water. Lotions are often too thin and contain other ingredients such as alcohols or preservatives which could potentially be irritating.

Don't over cleanse. Soaps that foam excessively can strip the skin of moisture and have an irritant effect. For kids, you may not need to use soap every time they bathe, it's okay to skip it when you can.

## When parents are shopping for kids with dry skin what should they be looking for?

**Dr. Maguiness:** Thick cream and ointments are best for sensitive skin in the winter, especially for children. Ointments such as Vaseline®, Aquaphor®,

or plain petroleum have no added preservatives or fragrances. Look for the words "fragrance free," "unscented," or "hypoallergenic" on products. Some moisturizers have the seal of approval from the National Eczema Association (NEA) and this can be helpful.

## How often and when should kids be using moisturizers?

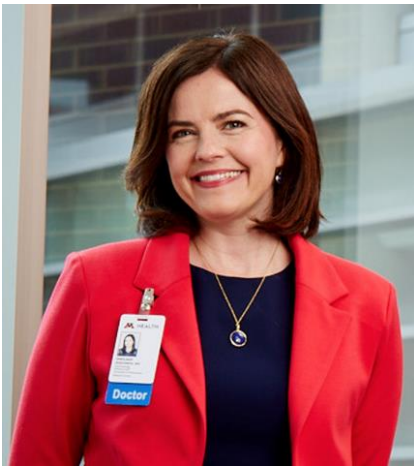
**Dr. Maguiness:** Two recent studies demonstrated that infants at risk for developing atopic dermatitis showed less signs of eczema when treated with a moisturizer head to toe at least once daily. So, there seems to be evolving evidence that regular use of emollients in infancy might help prevent the development of eczema in specific cases. During dry winter months, it certainly can't hurt to use a moisturizer at least once daily head to toe.

## What kind of clothing and laundry detergents should parents be choosing for their children with dry skin?

**Dr. Maguiness:** Even in the winter it's important not to overheat as in some children extremes of temperature can flare sensitive skin and eczema. Wearing cotton clothing and dressing in layers is often best. With any additional household products such as laundry detergents, choosing a fragrance free product may be helpful.

## When should someone with dry skin see a doctor?

**Dr. Maguiness:** If your child has dry itchy skin with red patches they might have eczema/atopic dermatitis so it is best to see your doctor. Any dry plaques that become open, weepy or crusted may be a sign of infection or super infection and would require appropriate treatment.



Dr. Maguiness is an Assistant Professor within pediatric dermatology at the University of Minnesota. She completed her dermatology residency and fellowship in pediatric dermatology at the University of California, San Francisco. Before joining the University of Minnesota Medical School and the University of Minnesota Health clinical practice, she was an attending physician at Boston Children's Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School. Dr. Maguiness is part of a team of experts in pediatric dermatology. She has a special interest in the diagnosis and management of atopic dermatitis, mastocytosis and vascular anomalies. Her research interests include atopic dermatitis and mastocytosis. She is committed to patient care, teaching and research in all aspects of pediatric dermatology.

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