Sins Of The Flesh

Don’t let winter weather and dryness run away with your skin

December 1, 2006 By Tana Moz, RN

To live with HIV, positive people need to be thick-skinned. But cold, wet winter weather and indoor heat can dry your epidermis, causing cuts and abrasions that increase your risk of infection—especially for those with CD4 counts near or below 200. Dryness can also worsen three common HIV complaints: folliculitis (bacterial or fungal infection of hair follicles), seborrheic dermatitis (itching, weepy yellow patches) and psoriasis (scaly red patches from tissue inflammation). And some HIV meds can make your skin dry, itchy and sensitive to light.

The good news: you don’t need a spa day or a seaweed wrap to stay dermatologically correct:

- Choose lotions packed with emollients (softeners) and moisturizers. I recommend two secret weapons: the Body Shop’s Shea Body Butter and Neutrogena’s Norwegian Formula Therapeutic Lotion.
- Chug water: eight 8-ounce glasses daily.
- Use sunscreen (year-round).
- Wear cotton undies (cotton breathes best).
- Don’t scratch or pick at lesions.
- Avoid long, hot showers and deodorant soaps: Both strip away natural oils. Go lukewarm, 15 minutes max.
- Moisturize your home with a humidifier, cleaned regularly to evict bacteria.

In any season, says physician’s assistant (PA) Bill Marinis, “Work with your MD to get periodic screenings and quick treatment for any sores, rashes or lesions.” Pore it on.

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