

Winter Skin Care Tips for Riders

Accomplished rider and cosmetic dermatologist, Donna Richardson, offers tips on how to maintain healthy skin in winter weather.

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Face it. We're all aware of the toll an equestrian lifestyle can take on our skin. Years spent riding outdoors, squinting against the sun's glare on arena sand and subjecting our hands to horse care products can leave us looking blotched, splotched, wrinkled and weathered before our time. Riding to the rescue is Donna Richardson, a board certified emergentologist (emergency room physician) who grew weary of treating gunshot wounds and drug overdoses. Instead, Richardson turned her skills to cosmetic dermatology and launched a unique business: Destinations Medical Spa, a mobile "spa on wheels" that comes to clients' homes to perform procedures. Richardson and her team offer the full range of treatments including Botox and laser hair removal. Now equestrians can get the same sort of rejuvenating house calls as Hollywood celebrities.

Richardson is not new to the world of horse people. An accomplished dressage competitor, she was a member of the USET's gold medal winning team at the 1999 Pan Am Games. She's also a USEF senior dressage judge and continues to coach junior and adult riders through the levels of the discipline. During a few spare moments, Richardson offered to share some of her tips on how to maintain healthy skin despite winter weather.

HC: We've all heard that sun damage is the No. 1 threat to youthful skin. How important is this in the winter?

Richardson: UVA and UVB rays are present year-round, therefore you must use a sunscreen that provides dual protection year-round. There are many sunscreens on the market, some good and some not. Be sure yours has both UVA and UVB protection. Extra antioxidants would help, too. But the most important thing to remember is to use sunscreen daily, ideally 30 minutes before you go outside. Apply liberally! Studies show most people only get half the SPF protection on the bottle because they don't apply enough. And don't forget to use it on hands, lips, ears, and your neck. Those areas are subject to premature aging and skin cancer, too.

HC: Dry, cold winter air really takes a toll on our faces and lips when we're riding. What can we do to protect our skin? And how can we wash away barn grime without dehydrating our complexion further?

Richardson: In cold winter climates, skin will lose moisture more quickly than in sunnier realms. It's important to use a lip balm with an SPF of 15 or higher several times a day when you're outside. Find a gentle facial cleanser and only use it twice a day—once in the morning and once when you come in for the day. You will probably benefit from a light moisturizer also, unless you have extremely oily skin. If you have acne, be sure to find a moisturizing product that's oil-free.

HC: Which complexion problems seem to be prevalent among longtime riders? And what would you offer as a treatment?

Richardson: The two most common problems are premature wrinkling and sun spots (those brown and red spots that suddenly appear on your face, neck and hands). For crow's feet and lines between the eyebrows, you can try to prevent them by wearing sunglasses to stop yourself from squinting. Botox alone can eliminate wrinkles that are there when the face is in motion. If you have facial wrinkles at rest, you'll need both Botox and a derma filler such as Restylane for that smooth, youthful look.

Sun spots are best treated with a series of intense pulsed light (IPL) Photofacials. Over the course of three to five treatments, almost all of the brown and red spots will disappear. Then it's up to the rider to use sunscreen to keep the spots from reappearing.

So, whether or not the sun is shining as you ride this winter, don't forget there are many important ways to protect your skin. And if you weren't aware of the importance of winter skin protection years ago, it never hurts to know there are always cosmetic options.