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# A Change in Season and Regimen

By CATHERINE SAINT LOUIS

IF Lisbeth Salander, the dark-lipped, pierced dynamo of [Stieg Larsson's](#) "Millennium" trilogy, wanted to soften her look a bit, November would be a good time to get rid of one of her tattoos. That also goes for [LeBron James](#), whose "Loyalty" tattoo, scrawled across his rib cage, has attracted derision since he left Cleveland for Miami.

Why now? Tattoo removal, like many other laser treatments, shouldn't be performed on tanned skin. "The danger is that your natural sun pigment — melanin — absorbs the laser light, and you end up with scabbing and crusting, then a temporary period of skin lightening," said Dr. Arielle Kauvar, a dermatologist in Manhattan.

With winter on the horizon, patients are likely to keep their inked shoulder blades under chunky knits, safely out of the sun, for the duration of treatment.

Most tattoo removals take 6 to 12 sessions, with multicolored intricate designs taking the longest, said Dr. Kauvar, a clinical professor of dermatology at the [New York University School of Medicine](#), so she has some patients schedule visits fall to spring two years in a row.

Much ado has been made of carefully timing cosmetic interventions so they remain a secret and get you to the ball, or a crucial meeting, looking fabulous. Seasonal changes can also affect results, and in some cases cause unpleasant side effects.

Laser treatments that single out brown spots, sun spots or unwanted hair are best done as days shorten. "Everybody is tan in July," said Dr. Jeffrey Dover, a dermatologist in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

He advises patients to come back after [Halloween](#) for light or laser treatments.

"Inexperienced treaters treat people all the time who are tan who don't realize they are," Dr. Dover said, adding botched hair-removal cases (resulting in blisters or light splotches) routinely result in lawsuits in Massachusetts.

Autumn, when one can wear tights and tall boots, is also a good time to treat unsightly leg veins with the procedure called [sclerotherapy](#) since, as Dr. Kauvar pointed out, “your veins actually do look worse before they look better.” Though they’re not exactly fashionable, she recommends wearing compression stockings for three days after each treatment. “Most people don’t want to wear heavy compression hose in 95 percent humidity,” she said.

Facial resurfacing, the kind that involves the removal of microscopic columns of tissue to create new collagen, requires roughly a week of at-home healing and weeks of avoiding ultraviolet rays — arguably an easier task when the sun sets early.

Dr. Dover said that his patients who are schoolteachers, however, have their faces resurfaced in late June and July to avoid scrutiny from their harshest critics. “Their kids are the worst audience of all,” Dr. Dover said, letting his voice sound childlike for a moment: “Ohhhh, Ms. Jones changed something.”

JUST as seersucker suits and linen dresses are stowed as an autumnal chill arrives, so should we adapt our beauty routines. As the temperature falls, the air tends to become drier, often leaving skin and lips parched. If your lips have hanging chads, it’s gauche to wear a bold statement color. Instead use Aquaphor healing ointment regularly — easier to spread than balms in stick form, Dr. Dover said.

Dr. Amy Derick, a dermatologist in Barrington, Ill., also cautioned patients to avoid licking their lips, since that aggravates dryness, sometimes resulting in an unattractively raw pout. “It looks like the mouth of a clown, a red rashy border around the lips,” she said.

Many women exfoliate their faces year-round to help speed their cell turnover and encourage a healthy glow.

In the winter, exfoliating their bodies may help ward off itch as well. Research has shown that in cold the cells of the upper epidermis (or corneocytes) accumulate, said Dr. Gil Yosipovitch, a professor of dermatology at [Wake Forest University](#) Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C.

With slower cell turnover, water evaporates more easily from these upper layers of skin, and nearby nerve fibers send a warning message to the body that all is not well (otherwise known as itch).

A lot of people think that exfoliating itchy, dry skin will only dry it out, but counterintuitively, Dr. Yosipovitch said, “I think it does have an effect on activating the cycle.” So consider using an exfoliating body wash in the shower to forestall scaly limbs (with moisturizer after).

Dr. Dover also recommended a warm-mist humidifier in the bedroom at night to help rehydrate the skin. He considers cold-air machines whose water isn't often changed a poor choice for people prone to sinus infections, because "it's like having a little pond in your room," he said.

DURING the stretch from Thanksgiving to the New Year, one ritual is hard to resist: overeating. But it's a myth that winter cold makes our bodies more prone to packing on pounds, said Dr. Michael D. Jensen, a professor of medicine at the [Mayo Clinic](#), who has studied fat for decades. The same old rule — calories in, calories out — applies.

But recently Dr. Jensen added a new wrinkle to an existing finding that people who gain weight in their legs and hips (known as "pears") are better off when it comes to diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure than those who gain it in the belly ("apples").

During his study, the results of which were published last month in [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#), 28 participants were overfed for eight weeks — something like the two-month eat-a-thon from Halloween to the year's end — gaining on average 5.5 pounds on top and 3.3 pounds on the bottom.

Those who gained leg fat did it by creating *more* fat cells, the study found; those who gained stomach fat just enlarged existing fat cells. In the past, it had been assumed that the number of fat cells in adults remained stable.

So the good news this season for prolific fat-cell makers is "your fat is doing what you want it to do: it's storing fat in your legs," Dr. Jensen said. "The bad news is you've got more fat cells."