



# CHECK IN

with Dr. Ruby Gill

## LET'S CHECK UP ON... THE MIND-SKIN CONNECTION: HOW DECEMBER STRESS SHOWS UP ON YOUR FACE

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Every December, we see an influx of laser cases in the clinic. I call these patients my “winter laser birds.” They understand how important it is to revitalize their skin at least once a year and address the sun damage that inevitably builds up over the summer. But the seasonal patterns I see are always interesting—and they can help you better manage your skin health as the temperature drops.

Let's start with the most common winter flare-ups: rosacea, eczema, and acne. An integrative dermatological approach is always my favorite, because time and time again I see the best results when we combine lasers, nutrition, movement, meditation, targeted supplements, and carefully chosen topicals. True skin healing often comes from the inside out.

What do all these flare-ups have in common? Inflammation. Winter stress increases inflammatory pathways in subtle but significant ways. It usually begins with changes in sleep patterns, holiday eating, alcohol, and end-of-year deadlines—all of which place extra pressure on the body. Stress isn't just emotional; it's very much physical. And while solstice season traditionally signals a time to slow down, most of us end up doing the opposite.

Women in perimenopause or menopause who haven't gained control of their hot flashes often start showing signs of rosacea this time of year. Teens and adults may notice acne flaring again. And eczema loves to make its grand re-appearance as the air becomes cold and dry. Assessing a patient's skin means also assessing their internal inflammatory system—that's the key to long-lasting prevention. Many of my most complex cases finally start improving only after we address the deeper inflammatory triggers that topical medications and antibiotics alone cannot resolve.

Your gut microbiome plays a major role in immunity and skin health. We also talk about something called the gut-brain axis, which explains why someone might say they feel “sick to their stomach” as an emotional response. That communication system is real, and it's deeply connected to inflammatory skin conditions. Once we get the gut and nervous system back into balance, the skin often follows.

With the right nutrients, strict dietary guidance, and a smart

combination of traditional prescription topicals, I rarely need to rely on long-term antibiotics. Conversations around stress reduction are just as important—lowering stress lowers inflammation, which results in clearer, calmer skin. As I often tell my patients: the happiest people are the prettiest people.

And now, let's talk about collagen and hydration. Lack of moisture and barrier damage can make the skin look dull, lax, and inflamed. Collagen can be helpful for both skin and joint health, and a simple home remedy I love is bone broth. Increasing medically monitored vitamin D, omega-3 intake, and fermented foods can support gut and skin health as well. One of my top winter tips: apply an oil-based moisturizer within three minutes of stepping out of the shower. And for my eczema-prone patients—please skip the olive oil topically. It disrupts the skin barrier and can make things worse.

There are three highly preventable behaviors that accelerate skin damage more than anything else: smoking, UV exposure (wear sunscreen daily and stay far away from tanning beds), and chronic dehydration or sleep deficiency.

If you stay ahead of winter weather and rising end-of-year demands by sleeping at least seven hours, hydrating well, keeping a low-glycemic diet rich in probiotics, and moisturizing consistently to prevent TEWL (transepidermal water loss), you can avoid most flare-ups entirely.

Many people have heard of IPL for rosacea, but my preferred technology is the BBL photofacial, a robust Stanford-developed, clinically proven form of photobiomodulation that helps repair and treat the skin more effectively than traditional IPL. When we combine excellent skin health habits with the most advanced laser systems, we create our signature “winter laser birds”—patients who understand that stressed skin is a reflection of a stressed body, and that healing one means healing both. •

*Schedule your integrative medicine consultation with Dr. Ruby Gill today! Take the first step toward thriving again with personalized, evidence-based care tailored to your unique needs. Let Dr. Gill help you reclaim your health, confidence, and joy!*



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