

Winter Wellness

SELF CARE FORUM FACT SHEET NO 25

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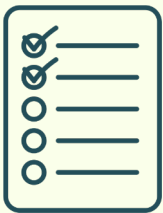
You matter!

Protect yourself from the risk that cold winter weather presents and take the right steps to look after your health and wellbeing. See also our Winter Illness fact sheet.

As the weather gets colder, it can make some health problems worse, such as asthma, COPD and other respiratory diseases, and lead to severe complications, especially for those more at risk in our communities, such as:

- people aged 65 and over
- people with long-term health conditions
- babies and children under 5
- people on a low income (so cannot afford heating)
- people with a disability
- pregnant women
- people with a mental health condition.

Remember to plan



It is easy to get caught out by a sudden change in the weather so plan ahead:

- Get ready with suitable clothes so you can layer up for warmth.
- Test and service your heating system to ensure you are ready for the colder months ahead.
- Sort out your medicine cabinet by checking your medicines are in date. The advice is that your medicine cabinet should include painkillers, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, indigestion treatments and a first aid kit containing a thermometer, plasters, and bandages.
- If invited, book and attend your annual NHS flu vaccination or COVID-19 booster jabs. Vaccination is well proven to be the safest and most effective way to protect against flu and COVID-19. The NHS invites some people for a free flu vaccination, such as those who might have weakened immune systems, but if you're not eligible, you may want to get a private vaccination to protect yourself.

Energy and warmth



- Try to keep the main room that you spend time in warm, heating it to a comfortable temperature of at least 18° if you can. Use hot water bottles, electric blankets, and heated throws to stay warm at night or when sitting still in the daytime. They are usually cheaper and better environmentally than turning up the thermostat.

- If you're indoors more than usual, stay as active as possible. Getting up and moving around every hour can help boost your mood and energy levels. If you go out, wear plenty of warm layers, not forgetting to take a hat and gloves to keep your head and hands warm.
- Try and block any areas in your home that are particularly draughty, including around window frames, keyholes and under doors.
- Keep your curtains open during the day to let light and warmth in, and draw them before it gets dark to avoid losing heat.
- Energy suppliers provide information about how to use your heating system more effectively and at a lower cost.

You may be eligible for specific grants and benefits to help reduce the cost of your energy bill. Seek advice from your local authority, Citizens Advice, or relevant charity organisations.

Ask your pharmacy team



- Community pharmacy teams are highly trained healthcare professionals including clinical pharmacists who work as part of a skilled team. They can advise on a range of common ailments and provide further support to keep you and your family safe and healthy during winter.
- Many pharmacies are open until late and at weekends. You do not need an appointment and most pharmacies have a private consultation room where you can discuss issues with pharmacy staff without being overheard.

Diet and eating



- Eating a healthy, balanced diet with at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily can strengthen your immune system. Regular hot drinks and food can help you to keep warm.
- Frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables (with no added salt or sugar) are also healthy and can be more affordable than fresh produce, especially if they're out of season in winter. Many people struggle with the high cost of food but recipes online can help you cook healthy meals on a budget. There is also advice on the most efficient cooking methods to use. But, if you need to use a food bank, please do not feel embarrassed or ashamed. Many people from different walks of life are experiencing hardships, you're not alone.
- The lack of sunlight in winter means our body cannot make enough vitamin D which is important for bone health and immunity. It's advisable to take a daily supplement with at least 10 micrograms of vitamin D in autumn and winter. A member of your pharmacy team can advise you on vitamin D supplements.

You matter!



- With shorter days, darker nights and more time indoors, winter can be a time of increased loneliness and isolation, making us feel depressed, especially if our vitamin D levels are low.
- Finding ways to connect and engage with people in your community, perhaps through volunteering can give you a sense of purpose and help you feel less lonely. You can find out what's on in your area in your local library, community centre, newspapers and social media.
- Simple actions, such as donating excess food or clothes, can give you a sense of purpose and fulfilment.
- Managing stress is important, as too much can affect how our immune system works. Stress can lower immune function and increase blood pressure. It can lead to us reaching for sugary snacks and drinking too much alcohol, impacting our overall mood.
- Being active and keeping in touch with friends and family can help improve your mood. Many people also find mindfulness helpful to gain perspective and connect with our thoughts and feelings. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>
- Access information about emotional wellbeing, and if you are struggling, please get in touch with your surgery, NHS111 in England and Wales, Phone First in NI or NHS24 in Scotland, or other support services or organisations.

Where to find more information

We have a range of fact sheets to help you manage common ailments, help with advice on health and wellbeing and inform you about vitamin D. <https://www.selfcareforum.org/fact-sheets/>

Visit the NHS website in your country: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/seasonal-health/keep-warm-keep-well/>
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/winter-illness> <https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/h/article/howtostaywellinwinter>
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