Winter Wellness

Self-Care Forum
Helping people take care of themselves

SELF-CARE FORUM FACT SHEET NO 25

GET READY

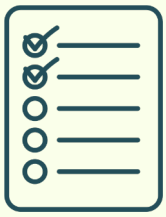
R	E	A	D	Y
Remember to plan	Energy & warmth	Ask your pharmacy	Diet & nutrition	You matter!

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. 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 the safest and best way to protect against flu and COVID-19. The NHS recommends flu vaccination and invites pregnant women, people with long term conditions, carers, frontline health workers, and children, some people with low immunity, rough sleepers and people using overnight hostels.

• COVID-19 boosters are offered to higher-risk groups each winter. You will be contacted if you are eligible for one.

• Eligibility for these vaccinations changes each year - check NHS.uk for current advice.

Energy and warmth



• Try to keep the main room that you spend time in warm — ideally 18°C or more, particularly if you are aged 65 or over, have a long term health problem, are in a vulnerable group or have a baby. 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.

• Improve the safety of your heating system by fitting a carbon monoxide alarm and getting your boiler serviced regularly.

• Check your eligibility for grants and benefits to help reduce the cost of your energy bill, including the Warm Home Discount, Cold Weather Payments, Winter Fuel Payments and Local Authority hardship funds. Seek advice from your local council, Citizens Advice, or charity organisations.

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Ask your pharmacy team

- Community pharmacists and their skilled teams can advise on a range of common conditions and provide 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.
- For people in England, Pharmacy First allows pharmacists to diagnose and supply prescription only medicines for specific conditions, including sore throat, sinusitis and earache. This service is available as NHS Pharmacy First Scotland, in Northern Ireland as Pharmacy First NI and a wider range of conditions is included in Wales within the Common Ailments Service (CAS).

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. Food costs are high for many people. Budget friendly recipes online can help you cook healthy meals. There is also advice on the most efficient cooking methods to use.
- If you are experiencing hardship, you are not alone. Food banks are a great way of getting support without stigma so do not feel embarrassed or ashamed about using them.
- The lack of sunlight in winter means our body cannot make enough vitamin D which is important for bone health and immunity. Take a daily supplement with at least 10 micrograms of vitamin D in autumn and winter. Some people (e.g. people with darker skin, those who prefer to cover up) may need supplements all year round. A member of your pharmacy team can advise you.

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.
- High stress can weaken your immune system and increase blood pressure so finding ways to manage it is important. 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.
- 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.
- Click for information: on mindfulness and NHS talking therapies for anxiety and depression.
- Reduce your risk of developing winter infections by regular hand washing, staying home when unwell and making sure your rooms are well-ventilated.
- Improve your safety at home - reduce your risk of falls by making sure you have good lighting, removing trip hazards and wearing good supportive footwear.

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
https://belfasttrust.hscni.net/healthy-living/winter-health/

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