Keeping well in the cold: what you can do

When autumn arrives, it's a good idea to get ready for winter to make sure you stay well.

Cold weather can trigger a flare-up of your symptoms and make you more vulnerable to illnesses. But there are lots of things you can do to look after your lungs this winter.

Avoid catching colds or flu

Catching a cold or another infection can trigger your symptoms to get worse or your condition to flare up.

If you catch a cold, watch out for symptoms that get worse. Make sure you know what to do if you become breathless or start to cough up phlegm. Make sure you know who to contact if you get worse.

Feeling unwell? Don't wait.

If you feel unwell, or spot your symptoms getting worse, follow your self-management plan.* Or get advice from your pharmacist, doctor or nurse before it gets more serious.

Don't hold off thinking it will get better on its own – act as soon as you can.

*If you have a long-term lung condition you should have a self-management plan. If you don't, talk to your GP or nurse about getting one.

Get a flu jab

Flu can be a serious illness, especially if you're living with a lung condition. That's why people with long-term conditions are eligible for a free flu jab. Don't put it off. Ask your GP or pharmacy today. Having a flu jab reduces the risk that you will need to be admitted to hospital.

Get a one-off anti-pneumonia vaccination too

If you've not already had one, ask about a pneumonia jab. It's recommended if you have a long-term lung condition such as COPD, bronchiectasis or pulmonary fibrosis.

If you can, avoid contact with people who have cold symptoms

Cold and flu spread very easily. It's so easy for children and grandchildren to pass their infections on. So if your grandchildren are full of cold, it's best to wave to them through the window!

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This can be hard, especially if you are asked to look after children when they are off school because they are unwell, but it's important to look after your own health.

Don't forget to tell your friends that if they have a cold or flu, visiting you is a particularly bad idea – no matter how nice your friends are.

Here are some other tips to reduce the risk of catching and spreading infections:

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and encourage other people around you to do the same
- cough into your elbow or the crook of your arm to reduce the spread of germs
- throw away used tissues as soon as you can
- wash your hands regularly or use a hand sanitiser gel if you're out and about

Stay warm

Keep your home warm

Heat your home to at least 18°C (64°F). You might prefer your living room to be slightly warmer during the day – especially if you:

- feel the cold
- know cold air can trigger a flare-up
- are not able to move around easily

Tip: Use an easy-to-read thermometer to check the temperature of your rooms so you know the best temperature for you.

If you can, air your home for ten minutes every day to help reduce condensation. If your home is damp, try to get rid of it. Condensation and damp conditions, especially if there is visible mould, can be particularly bad for people with lung conditions.

Overnight in winter, it's a good idea to keep your bedroom at this temperature too and to wear warm nightclothes. Keep your bedroom window closed on a winter's night. Breathing in cold air can increase the risk of respiratory infections.

Keep warm by wearing **layers of clothing** when it's cold. This traps warm air better than one bulky layer. Thermal underwear can be very useful, along with woollen tights and socks. Have a blanket or shawl to hand as well.

Have lots of **hot drinks** and at least one hot meal a day if you can. Eating regularly helps keep your energy levels up during the winter.

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Keep active

Try to stay as **active as you can** to generate body heat. Get up, move around and try to do some **exercise**. You'll feel better for it too. When you're indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour or so. Chair exercises are a good way to keep warm and active. Visit: **www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Exercises-for-older-people.aspx.** There are also some activities you can do if you use a wheelchair. Visit: **www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Disability/Pages/fitness-for-wheelchair-users.aspx**

If you're worried about going out in cold weather, ask someone to check up on you.

Look after your airways and lungs

Get support to quit smoking. Quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your winter health. Now is the best time, as winter brings an increase in the risk of complications like chest infections, heart attacks and stroke.

You're more likely to quit for good with the support of a local stop smoking service. See the help you can get at **https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree.**

When you're out and about

Check the weather before you go out. If it's too cold or breezy for you or you are not feeling well or are having trouble breathing, stay indoors and keep warm.

If you have a reliever inhaler, try using it half an hour before going outside. **Carry your reliever medication** with you as cold air can tighten your airways making it harder for you to breathe.

Try to **breathe through your nose** instead of your mouth as this will help warm the air you breathe in.

Protect your lungs and airways by wearing a hood or scarf that covers your mouth. It's best to use a smooth material that isn't scratchy if you can.

Plan ahead and stock up

If you live with a lung condition, it's important to **agree a plan** with your health care professional to help you manage your condition. This should include what to do and who to contact if your symptoms flare up. So talk to your health care professional if you don't have one.

They may also suggest you keep some medicines at home for an emergency. Make sure you're clear when you should start to use each one. You should tell your GP practice within two days of starting this treatment. Tell your doctor or nurse if things don't improve. If your symptoms become severe, get in touch with your GP or call 999 if you feel you can't wait. If infections hit you at the weekend or bank holiday, it may be more difficult to get in touch with your GP or to collect a prescription.

I**f you don't have a plan** and your symptoms flare up, get help straight away. Ask for an appointment with your GP and call 111 if you can't get to see them on the day. If your symptoms are much worse than normal, call 999. If you are too breathless to call, get someone to call for you.

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It's a good idea to:

- Ask your GP about a **prescription for medicine you can keep at home** to use when symptoms of a chest infection appear.
- If you do have medicines at home, check the use by dates to make sure they will see you through the winter.
- If you take your emergency medication, tell your health care professional that you have started it and use it as prescribed. After a flare-up, get in touch with your health care professional for a review and ask about a repeat prescription.

Give us a call on **03000 030 555** if you'd like more advice. Our friendly helpline team is available Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. They can also talk to you about extra help you might be entitled to during cold weather, such as winter fuel payments. Find out more at: **www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/welfare-benefits/heating-costs**

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline never costs more than a local call and is usually free, even from a mobile.

helpline@blf.org.uk blf.org.uk

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