

Health in Late Winter

Cold, wet and windy – we're getting tired of it and people are starting to come down with bugs. How can we stay healthy until the warm weather?

What illness do we have to look out for?

- The most common thing people get later winter are colds – these are easily passed by people coughing or sneezing close to us. Often they are minor but annoying – a dry cough that doesn't go away or that seems to go then comes back.
- Gastro illnesses are common – diarrhoea and nausea are the most common complaints and often these are a very low grade: enough to make you feel off but not really sick.
- Hayfever – As the flowers start to bloom, people with hayfever will start to get nasal congestion and itchy eyes!
- Depression – Feeling low or lacking energy is quite common in late winter.

What can cause health problems in late winter?

- Being in close contact with people – we tend to stay inside more so we're in close contact with people which means bacteria and viruses can spread more easily.
- Low immune system – if you've already fought off a cold and flu, your immune system may be impacted making it harder to fight other things off.
- Lack of sun – sun is necessary for our bodies to create Vitamin D which is important for both the immune system and mental health.
- Lack of exercise – exercise is not only important for the physical body, it also helps the immune system and lifts your mood.

What can we do to prevent getting sick?

- Wash your hands – a lot! Wash your hands after toileting, before handling food or eating, after you cough or sneeze. You may even want to carry some hand sanitiser to clean your hands in public or if you have to eat out.
- Use disinfectant wipes – If you're going to eat at a food court or in a very public place, think about how easy it is for other people to cough or sneeze on your table and cutlery.
- Vitamin D and Zinc – Take a Vitamin D supplement, we rarely get enough during winter. If you are having trouble shaking off a cold or gastro bug, a Zinc supplement may help.

What lifestyle changes can help our health?

- Get some sunshine – On sunny days go for a walk outside or do some gardening. If it's too cold, put a chair where the sun comes through the window so you can sit there.
- Exercise – Go for a walk or if the weather isn't good, go to the gym.
- Stay warm – Dress for the weather even if you're just working in the yard. A cold wind can be chilling so wear a windproof jacket and remember the raincoat in case it rains.
- Get plenty of sleep – rest is important for the immune system. Remember that getting cold at night can disturb our sleep so make sure there are enough quilts on the bed.

What should we be eating?

- Warming foods are best - slow cooked stews or casseroles or roasted foods.
- Remember lots of vegetables are important for the digestion and the immune system: carrots, onions, leeks, garlic, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage – all are good in a stew or casserole!
- Fruit is important in winter too: lemons and mandarins are in season - try a squeeze of fresh lemon juice in hot water or a lemon delicious pudding!