

## Winter Health

Winter has come in with a bang! It's cold, wet and dark – three things that can breed ill health. How can we stay healthy in winter?

### What are the biggest threats to health in winter?

- Being close to people – we tend to be inside more so we're in closer contact with people which means bacteria and viruses can spread more easily.
- Getting cold – Our body expends energy warming up leaving less for the immune system.
- Darkness – Lack of sunlight has significant effects on our physical and mental health.
- Wet or icy pavements – Injuries from slipping and falling are more common when it's wet or icy.

### What illnesses do we have to look out for?

- The most common thing people get during the colder months are colds and flus – This is a particularly bad year for the flu. We can catch them anywhere from infected people coughing or sneezing: on the train, in the supermarket and from friends or family.
- Gastro illnesses are common – Diarrhoea and vomiting are the most common complaints. These may be caused by spoiled food but more commonly they're a virus in winter.
- Pneumonia – Pneumonia is particularly common among older people. It's often overlooked until they start having difficulty breathing so it's worth getting any severe cough checked out.

### What can we do to avoid getting sick?

- Wash your hands – a lot! Especially before handling food or eating and after you cough or sneeze. Carrying some hand sanitiser can also be a good idea.
- 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 or cutlery.
- Cover your mouth and nose – if you're in a lift or confined space and you can't leave when somebody starts coughing, cover your nose and mouth with a handkerchief or tissue to avoid breathing in droplets that contain their virus.
- Avoid people who are clearly sick – Simply try to stay away from them: the checkout operator who's coughing and hacking or the work colleague who complains about diarrhoea.
- Some supplements may help – Vitamin D, Vitamin C and zinc all help to support the immune system.

### What lifestyle changes can help our health?

- Stay warm and dry – Dress for the weather and remember to take a raincoat or umbrella.
- Get some sunshine – Get out on the sunny days or put a chair where the sun comes through the window so you sit there on the coldest days.
- Get plenty of sleep – Rest is important for the immune system and 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 - think slow cooked stews or casseroles or things cooked slowly in the oven like roasts.
- Remember lots of vegetables are important for the digestion and the immune system: carrots, silverbeet, turnips, beans, beetroot, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage.
- Fruit is important in winter too: lemons and mandarins are in season and apples or pears are great stewed with some cinnamon or nutmeg!
- Garlic and onions are great to boost the immune system or try some ginger tea.