

## Healthy Aging in the Colder Months

The colder months present some special challenges for older people. What are the challenges and how can they be met?

### What are the biggest challenges to older people in the colder months?

- The main challenges are the cold, falls, aches or pains and eating and drinking enough.

### What can they do to stay warm?

- If you're warm in bed in the morning, don't get up until 8 o'clock. By this time, the frost has gone and it's usually starting to warm up.
- When you do get up, dress warmly. If you aren't having a shower straight away, put on a robe or a tracksuit. And remember slippers or other shoes – walking across cold tiles can make you feel cold quickly.
- When going outside, wear a wind proof jacket, scarf and hat. You lose a lot of heat through your head. Don't forget gloves. Cold finger can become stiff and sore very quickly.
- Don't underestimate the power of a wheat bag or hot water bottle during the day to warm you up. If using a hot water bottle, always check once it's full to make sure it doesn't leak and wrap it in a towel so it doesn't burn. Older skin tends to be more delicate.
- Make sure you're warm in bed. Warm up the bed with an electric blanket or hot water bottle before you get in and have a spare blanket just in case you get cold during the night.

### What can they do to avoid falls?

- Falling on icy or slippery pavements or grass isn't just awkward, it can lead to broken bones in elderly people. Not going out when it's raining or icy is the best way to avoid a fall but if you have to, using a walker or a walking stick – even if you don't usually – can help stop a fall.
- If you're with a younger person, take their arm. It will help to steady you and may stop you falling if you slip.

### What can they do to make sure they eat and drink enough?

- Older people actually need a little more protein than younger ones. This is because they don't absorb it as well and also because their muscles need a little more. Extra protein doesn't have to mean more meat. An egg for breakfast, baked beans on multigrain toast or a soup with lentils and beans can fill the gap.
- Older people can have difficulty swallowing and meals with lots of meat or hard vegetables don't appeal. Instead, try soups, slow cooked casseroles or well cooked vegetables with sauce.
- Staying hydrated is often an issue. Having a cup of tea or a glass of warm water every hour and a half is the best idea. Many older people don't like to drink too much because they need to urinate more often. This may be happen because muscle at the base of the bladder losing strength as we age. It's better to trot to the toilet often than collapse from dehydration and break a bone.
- Some elderly people don't drink late in the day because they are worried about falling on the way to the toilet in the middle of the night. Keep drinking and consider alternatives such as using a pee bottle like the ones used in hospitals or men can put a bucket by the bed.

### What about those aches and pains?

- Some aches and pains are caused by the cold. Warming up with a shower or wheat bag can often help. Also, disposable heat pads, ones that stick on your clothes not skin, are useful.
- Dehydration is well known to contribute to aches and pain – drink plenty of warm fluids.
- Acupuncture can help aches and pains that just don't seem to go away.

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