

# Keeping well in winter if you have a long term respiratory condition

Information and advice for patients

## *Community Respiratory*

### **Why is it important to keep well in the winter?**

If you have a long-term respiratory condition such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or asthma your symptoms may get worse with colder weather during winter.

To manage your symptoms, you must be **'weather-wise'**. Being weather-wise means:

- **Knowing** why it is important to manage your condition during the winter
- **Having information** to manage your condition during the winter months
- **Making changes** to your lifestyle to prevent your condition from getting worse

**If you do notice your respiratory condition becoming worse, contact us as soon as possible because the earlier we treat your symptoms, the quicker you will recover.**

### **How can I keep well in winter?**

To keep well in winter you should read and follow the advice in this booklet. If you need further advice and support please call us.

### **Keeping warm**

It is good to go outside and exercise in the winter, but make sure you are dressed warmly and it is not raining or snowing heavily. If you are shivering this means your body is not coping with the cold and this may be harmful to your health.

To keep warm you should:

- **Wear layers of clothing** such as thermal underwear, warm tights, socks and a coat to help keep you warm.
- **Wear a warm hat, gloves and a scarf** this will help keep your head, hands, neck and shoulders warm.
- **Wear warm clothes at night** during very cold weather, and use extra bedcovers.
- **Be active** as moving around and exercising will generate heat.
- **Check the weather** before going out so you know what to expect.
- **Avoid going out when it is very cold (less than 4°C)** especially when it is windy or wet as this will cool your body quickly.
- **Keep moving when outside or go inside if you start shivering.**
- **Breathe through your nose** instead of your mouth this will help to warm the air you are breathing
- **Pull your scarf over your mouth and nose.**

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- **Wear sensible shoes** Dry, flat boots or shoes with good non-slip soles will help keep you stable and give protection from the cold, rain and snow.

As well as keeping warm you should carry any medication you take with you at all times. If you have a bronchodilator, use it 30 minutes before going outside.

## **Keeping your house warm**

The recommended temperature in the living room is 21°C and 18°C in the bedroom.

To keep your house warm, you should:

- Keep it well ventilated - This will improve the air quality by reducing pollutants in the air which can build up with bad ventilation, and also prevent mould which can affect your respiratory condition.
- Close the window at night - A cold bedroom can make your condition worse. If you get hot, you can use an electric fan instead.
- Close your curtains when it gets dark - This will help keep the heat in the house
- Make sure your thermostats are set correctly - Hot water should be 60°C - 65°C and central heating should be 21°C.
- Avoid having furniture blocking the radiators - as the furniture will heat up instead of your room.
- Get advice about making your home energy efficient - from the council or your energy provider and have your boiler serviced by a registered engineer

## **Eat and drink plenty of fluids**

Food and drink are important to give you energy and keep your body warm. Make sure you have enough food stocked in the house during the cold weather.

Drinking plenty of fluids will help your symptoms. This is especially important in winter when indoor heating makes the air very dry.

Hot drinks are a good way of keeping warm. You can have a hot drink before you go to bed or have a hot drink in a flask to keep by your bed at night.

## **Avoid infections**

Viral infections such as a cold, flu or airway infections can make your symptoms worse. They can:

- Make your breathing worse
- Make you cough
- Change the colour of your sputum

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- Increase the amount of sputum you produce

Avoid contact with people who have a viral infection, even friends and relatives.

## **Protect yourself against flu**

Flu is a virus which spreads very quickly and can lead to serious illness.

You should have an annual influenza vaccination (flu jab)

Contact your GP or district nurse to make an appointment to receive your flu jab or if you are unsure of the vaccinations and need advice in more detail.

## **Wash your hands**

You can catch viral infections by touching things that anyone with a cold has touched. You can prevent this by washing your hands. You should:

- Wash your hands with soap and water regularly
- Pay attention to your nails and between your fingers
- Take time to dry your hands properly using a clean towel

You can use hand gel for added protection, especially when you are in public places.

## **Keep Active**

Try to keep as active as you can by doing simple exercises at home like walking to the local shops, shopping or even cleaning or gardening.

Walking is a good activity and it can improve the way your heart and lungs work. You can walk around the house or an indoor shopping centre if it is too cold outside. If you have difficulty walking then you can move your arms and legs, and wiggle your fingers and toes instead.

It is normal to be a little breathless when you are moving around because you are being active. Even people without respiratory conditions get out of breath when they are active. You should plan what you are going to do and take regular breaks. Try to avoid sitting down too long.

**To help keep yourself well and avoid infections, wash your hands regularly, keep active, stay warm and eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day.**

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### **Do not run out of medication**

Always keep enough of your medicines to last two weeks, including oxygen cylinders if you use them. Make arrangements with your GP and pharmacist so you do not run out of medication especially during the weekends and bank holidays, like Christmas

### **Stop smoking**

Smoking reduces how well your lungs work. Stopping smoking is very important to help your breathing.

The NHS has free advice services to help you stop smoking. For more information contact:

- Your GP, practice nurse or local pharmacist
- Sandwell Healthy Lifestyle Choices Service on 0800 011 4656
- NHS Smoking Helpline on 0800 169 0169

### **What can I do if I am feeling depressed or anxious?**

Living with a long term respiratory condition has a big impact on how you manage in your everyday life, and many people can be affected with low mood, anxiety or panic.

Breathlessness and panic attacks can be frightening and knowing this may happen again could increase your breathless.

If you feel very anxious or you have little interest or pleasure in doing things and you are unhappy, tell us and we will help you.

### **What should I do if my symptoms get worse?**

If at any time your symptoms become worse you should contact us as soon as possible so we can help you and give you advice if needed.

Many people with a respiratory condition wait until they are very ill before asking for help. The earlier you are treated the less likely you are of becoming very unwell. Ideally, you should start your treatment within the first 2 days of your symptoms starting.

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### Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this leaflet please call us on the number below:

#### Community Respiratory Team

0121 612 2007

Monday – Friday 8.30am – 8.00pm

Saturday and Sunday 8.30am – 4.30pm

### Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.sbhengage.com](http://www.sbhengage.com) follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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