



9 steps to winter wellness

Beat the chill and fight the blues

Winter brings both physical and mental challenges, but here are some ideas to help keep you well during the colder months.



Get vaccinated

The Flu Vaccine: People with neuromuscular conditions are at an increased risk of serious complications from the flu. One of the best ways to prevent getting the flu is by having the vaccine. Most

people with neuromuscular conditions are able to access the flu vaccine free of charge. Speak to your GP or Practice Nurse to arrange an appointment. Get more information at www.immune.org.nz

The Pneumococcal Vaccine: This vaccine is recommended for people with a neuromuscular condition, particularly if aspiration or immunosuppression is present. People who are in regular close contact with immune-compromised people with a neuromuscular condition should also be vaccinated.

The pneumococcal vaccine is available through your GP, but the cost is between \$65 and \$76 for the majority of adults over 18 years of age. The MDA believes that people with neuromuscular conditions should have access to government funding for this vaccine, on the basis of

respiratory vulnerability. We will lobby the Ministry of Health about in this issue, but in the meantime, if your GP has recommended you have this vaccine and you cannot afford it, we would like to help. This winter, MDA has set aside \$5,000 to help our adult members gain access to this costly vaccine (*children under aged 18, or older people

over 65 years are free). Contact info@mda.org.nz or your fieldworker for information on how we can help pay for this vaccine.



Feet first

Winter is hard on your whole body, but your feet can really have a tough time. Poor circulation in people who use wheelchairs can lead to sores and chilblains (an inflammation

followed by itchy irritation caused by moist cold). The key is keeping your feet warm. Try several layers of socks, or snug sheepskin-lined slippers or Ugg boots – which you can wear inside or out. Heated electric socks are available online. If you do get chilblains, get advice from your doctor.



Get your vitamins

Vitamin C helps keep your immune system healthy and can help reduce the length and severity of a cold if you get one. As well as considering supplements, fill your fruit bowl with

lemons, oranges and feijoas.

Iron and zinc are also keys to a healthy immune system. You can boost your dietary intake of these goodies by looking for dark, leafy greens and red and yellow vegetables, which are all high in antioxidants.



Turn to the light

Vitamin D is essential for healthy bones. If possible, it's best to get your vitamin D from the sun by heading outside for a while during the middle of the day. The sun is the best source of vitamin D,

As well as considering supplements, fill your fruit bowl with lemons, oranges and feijoas.

and it contributes to a powerful strengthening of your immune system when your body can naturally produce vitamin D from moderate sun exposure. During winter, we can also get it from oily fish and eggs. You can also get vitamin D in supplement form.

It's not just your bones that will thank you, getting some light is also good for your mental wellbeing. You may find that your mood improves with as little as 10 minutes of sun exposure.



Wash your hands

It sounds ridiculously simple, but regular and careful handwashing is the number one way to stop the spread of germs.

Carry hand-sanitiser. Remind children about the importance of washing their hands every few hours and in particular after going to the toilet and before eating.



Keep moving

While it's tempting to hibernate during the colder months, maintaining some kind of exercise programme over the winter will have significant benefits. As long as you choose a programme that's right for you and your condition, physical activity can make it easier to sleep and breathe, help with relaxation and balance, and assist with maintaining a healthy bodyweight.

Try mixing it up and trying something new – swimming in a heated indoor pool is a great option when it's awful outside.



Stay hydrated

You may not feel the need to reach for a cool glass of water to cool you down in winter, but your body still needs to be hydrated to keep healthy.

Dehydration will leave you at a

higher risk of catching a cold or a flu, while moisture will help make mucous membranes, including those in your sinuses, more resistant to bacteria.

If cold water doesn't appeal when it's cold outside, try a cup of warm water with a slice of lemon in it.



Get your sleep

Getting enough good quality sleep is one of the best things you can do for your health and it's vital during winter to keep your immune system in optimum

condition. Experts tell us the average

person needs between seven and nine hours every night, so do yourself a favour and turn in early every now and again this winter.



Make some plans

It's only natural to start feeling a bit down when you're cooped up inside because of bad weather or the effect it has on your body.

Having a few things to look forward to can work wonders and it's been

shown that keeping your mind active and socialising is good for your mental health, and helps ward off the winter blues. Make an effort to keep in touch with the people you care about and make some plans together. Here are some ideas:

- Plan a midwinter Christmas dinner with everyone contributing their favourite dish
- Pick up a new hobby – go to a class or teach yourself by following online tutorials
- Hold a retro movie night at your place and watch some old classics
- Plan your summer holiday

What works for you?

We asked some of our members to share their tips for getting through the colder months.

Olivia Shivas: Winter is one of those seasons I have a love/hate relationship with. On the one hand I love the cozy fashion, warm drinks and delicious comfort food, but on the other hand I despise feeling so cold you can't keep yourself warm. However, after spending last December in Finland, where I experienced snow and -18 degrees celsius temperatures, I reckon this winter will be much easier to survive! I'm a big fan of wheatie bags and I usually have one over my slippers to keep my toes warm - I even take one to work sometimes! I also make sure that I'm getting enough vitamin C by taking tablets and drinking Berocca to fight off any nasty colds. It's easy to want to stay inside all the time and become a lonely hermit when it's cold and dark, so in order to stay well in winter I like to busy myself by catching up with friends as much as possible. The more often I hang out with friends over a hot chocolate or have a movie night with some girlfriends at home, the better mood I am in - which is good for me and everyone else around me! So keep your body and mind well this winter - spring will be here before you know it.

Lara Elliot: Most winters I keep warm mainly with my big winter socks over normal socks and of course a really good electric blanket. I also started wearing thermals last year which was very good. It's not easy staying warm over winter, but nice homemade winter vegetable soups are a must.

Raymond Mok: I hate the cold because my hands often get so cold in winter that I have trouble driving my power wheelchair. My weird ways of keeping well in winter include eating fruits high in vitamin C such as lemons and ginger (I like to eat them), and drinking ginger and cinnamon teas. I also take supplements and vitamins in the same quantities all year round. I believe staying away from unhealthy foods helps me too.

Paul Arthur: I find the winter period really hard to get through. Layers of clothing, (especially socks and thermals), and a good heat pump help. With heating such an issue, I have found it is easier to heat a dry area. I recommend a dehumidifier to dry the air as well. I find that you need to remain active. Going to the movies or keeping outside interests to prevent cabin fever setting in and keeping a positive attitude certainly help.