PATIENTS COMMUNITY
PRACTICE AND DISTRICT NURSES
LEG CLUB®
www.legclub.org

Winter tips

As we approach shorter, darker days and more time is spent indoors it can impact on one's health and wellbeing negatively. For example, some people who live alone may experience a deep sense of loneliness during the cold winter months leading to uncertainty, anxiety and lack of self-worth and motivation. Especially as there is the additional challenge of restrictions put in place by government this winter to stop the spread of coronavirus, which could mean families and friends are kept apart and people living alone will have less human contact. Hence, it's important to look after yourself and wrap up warmly, as the cold winter weather can be more harmful than you think, especially for the elderly or vulnerable.

Here are some tips to stay healthy and warm during the cold winter weather!

Taking precautions during this time of year is very important and can be achieved by eating sensible food, keeping warm indoors and wearing warm clothing when going outdoors to aid circulation.

Food is a vital source of energy, which keeps your body warm during the winter months. Make sure you have hot meals and warm drinks regularly throughout the day as foods help preserve body heat. Also, keep active and mobile during the day, in order to increase blood flow and raise body heat.

During the winter months, people tend to stay inside where it's warm rather than face the cold, but inactivity has the capacity to hinder circulation. This is because exposure to cold temperatures can negatively affect blood flow, particularly to your hands and feet.

When it's cold outside there are a number of common sense things that you should do to keep yourself warm. For example, wearing layers of warm clothes and remember more layers are needed when outside. The face, neck, and hands are high vascular areas, and we can lose heat quickly from them so ensure you keep those exposed areas covered.

As we get older and perhaps start experiencing reduced mobility, the cold weather and icy conditions can affect our balance which can lead to falls. Also, cold winter weather can lead to hypothermia when the body becomes so cold that it starts to shut down. Signs of hypothermia include slowed reactions and movements, sleepiness, slurred or slow speech and confusion. Wearing layered winter clothing along with a hat, gloves and warm shoes can do wonders in preventing hypothermia.

When it's cold outside people who experience chronic pain, for example from arthritis, may find it worse so it's important to talk to your doctor or practice nurse if you find your joints are more painful than usual.

Because lower temperatures and winds can reduce body heat, blood vessels tend to constrict, making it more difficult for oxygen to reach the entire body so it's important to keep your home warm and staying active is important to enhance healthy circulation during winter. Age UK recommends keeping the living room at 21°C, the bedroom at 18°C and the rest of the house at least 16°C. Set the heating to come on just before getting up and switch off after bedtime. If it's very cold, set the heating to come on earlier and turn off later rather than turning the thermostat up. Wear a warm hat and avoid sitting or lying down for long periods of time as it can make it harder to keep a normal body temperature in cold weather.

age UK
Improving later life

In snow and icy weather we are at an increased likelihood of falling. Make sure that areas around your home are cleared and cover paths with salt to prevent slippage and falls, and don't hesitate to ask for assistance with these tasks.

During the cold weather many seniors bring out their hot water bottles to provide warmth, comfort and relief from aches and pains. However, many seniors with sensitive skin and people with reduced feeling in parts of their bodies should avoid using hot water bottles as they can cause serious burns which may become deep and infected.

Buy a new hot water bottle each winter and follow the instructions for filling and use. Do not fill your hot water bottle with boiling water and ensure you don't leave the hot water bottle on any part of the body for more than 20 minutes as burns can occur gradually and always use a cover. Also, bed socks will help to keep your feet warm!

Useful websites

www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/keep-well-this-winter/stay-healthy-in-winter

www.nia.nih.gov

www.agespace.org

www.caresourcer.com

www.healthinaging.org

www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/loneliness

www.mind.org.uk

www.samaritans.org

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

The Leg Club title, wording and logo are protected by registered trademark in the UK. **www.legclub.org** © E T Lindsay