



Keeping well in the cold: what you can do

When autumn arrives, it's a good idea to get ready for winter to make sure you stay well. Cold weather can trigger a flare-up of your symptoms and make you more vulnerable to illnesses. But there are things you can do to look after your lungs this winter.

Avoid catching colds or flu

Catching a cold or another infection can trigger your symptoms to get worse or your condition to flare up.

If you catch a cold, watch out for symptoms that get worse. Make sure you know what to do if you become breathless or start to cough up phlegm. Make sure you have numbers on hand for your out of hours GP or specialist in case you need to contact them.

Feeling unwell? Don't wait.

If you feel unwell, or spot your symptoms getting worse, follow your self-management plan*. Or get advice from your pharmacist, doctor or nurse before it gets more serious. Don't hold off thinking it will get better on its own – act as soon as you can.

*If you have a long-term lung condition you should have a self-management plan. If you don't, talk to your GP or nurse about getting one.

Get a flu jab every year

Flu can be a serious illness, especially if you're living with a lung condition. That's why people with long-term conditions are eligible for a free flu jab. Don't put it off. When autumn arrives, ask your GP or pharmacist about getting a free flu jab. Having a flu jab reduces the risk that you will need to be admitted to hospital.

Get a one-off anti-pneumonia vaccination

If you've not already had one, ask about a pneumonia jab. It's recommended if you have a long-term lung condition such as COPD, bronchiectasis or pulmonary fibrosis. You should be offered one if you're over 65.

If you can, avoid contact with people who have cold symptoms

Cold and flu infections spread very easily. So, if your friends and family are full of cold, it's best to wave to them through the window! You should tell your friends and family that if they have a cold or flu they shouldn't visit. This can be hard, but it's important to look after your own health.

Here are some other tips to reduce the risk of catching and spreading infections:

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and encourage other people around you to do the same
- if you don't have a tissue, cough into your elbow or the crook of your arm to reduce the spread of germs
- throw away used tissues as soon as you can
- wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitiser gel if you're out and about

Take care of your general wellbeing

In winter, it's normal to feel more tired, sleep more, put on weight and generally feel low. These are also common symptoms of depression. It's important you take the time to look after your mental health. Try to stay in touch with your friends and family by phone and keep as active as you can.

It's especially important during winter you eat a nutritionally balanced and varied diet. Foods and fluids contain essential nutrients to help prevent infections and keep you and your lungs healthy. Read more about eating well for your lungs at [blf.org.uk/eating-well](https://www.blf.org.uk/eating-well)

Stay warm

Keep your home warm

Heat your home to at least 18°C (64°F). You might prefer your living room to be slightly warmer during the day – especially if you:

- feel the cold
- know cold air can trigger a flare-up
- are not able to move around easily

Tip: Get a thermometer to check the temperature of your rooms so you know the best temperature for you.

If you need help with heating costs, you might be entitled to welfare benefits. Take a look at our guidance on getting help with heating costs at [blf.org.uk/support-for-you/welfare-benefits/heating-costs](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/welfare-benefits/heating-costs)

If you think your home is damp, it's important to act quickly to find out what's causing the damp and how to deal with mould. Take a look at [how to prevent condensation in your home \(blf.org.uk/support-for-you/indoor-air-pollution/improving-air-quality#condensation\)](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/indoor-air-pollution/improving-air-quality#condensation). There's lots of useful tips on how to deal with mould on our sister charity website, [Asthma UK \(www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/moulds-and-fungi/\)](https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/moulds-and-fungi/)

It's a good idea to keep your bedroom to at least 18°C (64°F) and to wear warm nightclothes. Keep your bedroom window closed on a winter's night. Breathing in cold air can increase the risk of respiratory infections.

Keep warm by wearing layers of clothing when it's cold. These trap warm air better than one bulky layer. Thermal underwear can be very useful, along with woollen tights, socks and even a hat. Have a blanket or shawl to hand as well.

Have lots of hot drinks and at least one hot meal a day if you can. Eating regularly helps keep your energy levels up during the winter.

Keep active

Try to stay as active as you can to generate body heat. Get up, move around and try to do some exercise. You'll feel better for it too. When you're indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour or so.

Take a look at our **online exercise videos** (blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/exercise-video) – they're designed to help people with lung conditions stay active. You can also **download our exercise handbook** (blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/what-activities-can-i-do#handbook) for free.

The NHS has useful resources to help you stay active. **Chair exercises** (www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises) are a good way to keep warm and active, and there are **activities you can do if you use a wheelchair** (www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/wheelchair-users-fitness-advice).

Look after your airways and lungs

In colder weather it's important to make sure you're looking after your lungs.

When you're out and about

Check the weather before you go out. If it's too cold or breezy for you or you are not feeling well or are having trouble breathing, stay indoors and keep warm. Keep an eye on humidity levels as well, as high humidity might affect your breathing. When out and about, make sure to keep your extremities (head, hands and feet) warm by wearing a hat, gloves and even an extra pair of socks if you need to.

If you have a reliever inhaler, try using it 15 minutes before going outside. **Carry your reliever medication** with you as cold air can tighten your airways making it harder for you to breathe.

Try to **breathe through your nose** instead of your mouth as this will help warm the air you breathe in.

Protect your lungs and airways from cold air by wearing a hood or scarf that covers your mouth. It's best to use a smooth material that isn't scratchy if you can.

If you're worried about going out in cold weather, ask someone to check up on you or to go with you.

Plan ahead

If you live with a lung condition, it's important to agree a plan with your health care professional to help you manage your condition. This should include what to do and who to contact if your symptoms flare up. Talk to your health care professional if you don't have one. Read more about COPD (blf.org.uk/support-for-you/copd/flare-ups) and bronchiectasis flare-ups (blf.org.uk/support-for-you/bronchiectasis/coping-with-flare-ups) and having an asthma action plan (www.asthma.org.uk/advice/manage-your-asthma/action-plan).

Your health care professional may also suggest you keep some medicines at home for an emergency. These are sometimes called rescue packs. Make sure you know when you should start to use each one. You should tell your GP practice within 2 days of starting this treatment. Tell your doctor or nurse if things don't improve. If your symptoms become severe, get in touch with your GP or call 999 if you feel you can't wait.

If you don't have a plan and your symptoms flare up, get help straight away. Ask for an appointment with your GP and call 111 if you can't get to see them on the day. If your symptoms are much worse than normal, call 999. If you are too breathless to call, get someone to call for you.

If infections hit you at the weekend or bank holiday, it may be more difficult to get in touch with your GP or to collect a prescription.

It's a good idea to:

- If you haven't already, **register with your GP practice for online services (www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/gps/gp-online-services)** including prescriptions. For more information on how technology can help you manage your lung condition better, take a look at our **technology for lung health hub (blf.org.uk/technology-for-lung-health)**
- Ask your GP about a **prescription for medicine you can keep at home** to use when symptoms of a chest infection appear. These are sometimes called rescue packs.
- If you do have medicines at home, check the use by dates to make sure they will see you through the winter.
- If you take your emergency medication, tell your health care professional that you have started it and use it as prescribed. After a flare-up, get in touch with your health care professional for a review and ask about a repeat prescription.

Get support to quit smoking. **Quitting smoking (blf.org.uk/support-for-you/smoking)** is the best thing you can do for your winter health. Now is the best time, as winter brings an increase in the risk of complications like chest infections, heart attacks and stroke.

You're more likely to quit for good with the support of a local stop smoking service. See the help you can get at www.nhs.uk/smokefree

Give us a call on **03000 030 555** if you'd like more advice on keeping well in the cold. Our friendly helpline team is available Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. They can also talk to you about extra help you might be entitled to during cold weather, such as winter fuel payments (blf.org.uk/support-for-you/welfare-benefits/heating-costs).

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline will cost the same as a local call.

helpline@blf.org.uk

blf.org.uk

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blf.org.uk/cold-weather

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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **blf.org.uk**