



Winter Chill Presents Challenges to Senior Health

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Everyone can be affected by winter weather, but it is especially challenging for seniors, who can be more prone to seasonal health problems and overall decline in both physical and mental health.

As for our physical health, the first things we think about in winter are seasonal maladies: flu, aches, pains, fever, cough, cold, and infections. We have been fighting these problems since the beginning of time but now, **one of the best things we can do to fight the infections of winter is to get the flu vaccine each year.** While usually given in late fall, seniors can get their shots throughout the winter season. The pneumonia vaccine is recommended for everyone over 65 and for those under 64 who have other health complications, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes. Another good defense against winter infections is to **frequently wash your hands and disinfect common areas** such as phones, keyboards, shopping cart handles, and door knobs.

If you take over-the-counter medications for winter illness, be cautious and make sure that what you are taking does not interfere with your prescription medications. If you are using medications that contain acetaminophen, caution is urged. **Monitor your total daily dosage of acetaminophen (generic for Tylenol) to be sure that you don't go over a limit of 3 Gm or 3000 mg daily.** Many of the medications used to treat flu, aches, pains, fever, cough & cold can each contain an adult dose of acetaminophen. Some examples are: Arthritis Foundation Pain Reliever, Aspirin Free Anacin, Aspirin Free Pain Relief, Datril, Feverall, Liquiprin and Tylenol Arthritis. Also, don't forget to include the acetaminophen that may be a part of your prescription medication

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http://www.srcareexperts.org/pdfs/agingwell/2011_winter.pdf

Cold weather often interferes with exercise, which can cause weight gain and changes in blood sugar and muscle strength. Changes in exercise habits may mean that a diabetic medication dose needs to be changed or at least more closely monitored. Lack of exercise may also cause pains to worsen; in part because the cold weather prompts us to hold our muscles tight (part of the chill reflex) and tightened muscles can increase joint pain. When we exercise or become active, we sometimes hurt at first, then the pain dissipates. **As we exercise and become more active, our body produces endorphins- nature's pain relievers.** Sometimes we can feel better just by being active, so staying active is often the first, and best medicine for aches and pains.

During the winter months there is less sunlight and seniors have a greater tendency to stay indoors, further reducing the benefits of sunlight. **Less sunlight can mean that our body produces less melatonin and Vitamin D.** Lowered melatonin may result in changes in how you sleep and may adversely affect our health. Vitamin D is needed to help keep bones strong. It is now recommended that all seniors be screened for vitamin D levels to help avoid broken bones. Multivitamins contain vitamin D, but some older adults need to take larger doses and a prescription is required.

Reduced sunlight may also dampen your mood or spirit. It is called seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Seniors taking an antidepressant who feel as if their medication doesn't work as well during the winter should report how they are feeling to the doctor who prescribed the medication.

Another winter problem is dry skin and dehydration. Homes, offices and cars can have dry heat, causing body moisture to evaporate more rapidly. Drinking enough fluids is important to prevent dehydration and help your medications work effectively. Help dry itchy skin by drinking more water and applying moisturizers to the skin each day especially after bathing.

Poor circulation can cause seniors to feel even colder in winter. It is especially important to keep extremities (finger tips and toes) warm; with diabetes, it is an absolute necessity. When taking multiple medications (prescription or non-prescription), the challenges of winter can even be a greater burden. Winter can change how you respond to your medications

and how you feel. During the winter, small changes in to your day-to-day activities can produce very different and possibly challenging outcomes. Should you wish to achieve the best outcomes from your medications this winter, you are encouraged to seek the support and direction of a senior care pharmacist who is specifically trained to address senior's concerns.

Take care of physical and mental health this winter, stay warm and hydrated and seek professional advice if any medication concerns arise.

