Monthly health tips
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Vitality Voice

Keeping healthy in winter, hygiene tips and flu season myths vs facts.

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Keeping healthy in winter

As the colder months approach, many Australians experience a range of challenges that can impact overall health wellbeing.

Preparing ourselves for the colder months ahead

As autumn unfolds and the days grow shorter, we find ourselves on the cusp of winter, a season that brings its own unique charm and challenges. While the chill in the air is still mild, it's the perfect time to start thinking about how we can prepare our bodies and minds for the colder months ahead.

It's easy to fall into a routine of comfort eating and reduced activity, in this edition, we will explore some healthy habits that can help you thrive during the winter months. By adopting a few simple yet effective habits, you can boost your physical and mental wellbeing, ensuring that you not only survive but truly thrive in the colder weather.

Enjoy winter seasonal vegetables and fruit

Grapefruit, kiwifruit, mandarins, and oranges are all delicious fruits that are in season during winter and are high in vitamin C. If you're not already doing so, consider adding fruit to your breakfast, and aim to include an extra serving of vegetables with each main meal. Broccoli, carrots, and cauliflower are excellent winter vegetables, especially for soups. While fresh produce is ideal, don't hesitate to stock your freezer with affordable and convenient frozen vegetables that can easily enhance any meal.

Stay hydrated

It's essential to drink plenty of water throughout the day, even in winter when we may not feel as thirsty. Cooler temperatures and indoor heating can dry out our skin, making hydration crucial for maintaining skin health and flushing out toxins.

Drinking tea, especially black and green varieties, provides numerous health benefits. With roots dating back to ancient China, tea gains attention for its positive effects on health. These teas are rich in flavonoids, plant chemicals known for their antioxidant properties. This winter, why not take on all of these healthy things, more vegetables, taking time to enjoy tea, and going for a walk every day!

Embracing healthy eating habits

Winter is an excellent time to reassess portion sizes, particularly for hearty staples like rice, pasta, and potatoes. While these foods are comforting and delicious, they can be easy to over-serve. Opting for appropriate portions can help manage your weight and create space on your plate for more nutritious vegetables.

Warm, hearty dishes like stews and casseroles are perfect for winter. These meals can be packed with a variety of vegetables, making them not only comforting but also rich in heart-healthy nutrients. When preparing these dishes, remember to trim excess fat from meats and incorporate legumes such as kidney beans, chickpeas, soybeans, or lentils for added fibre. Using reduced-salt stock can also enhance the healthiness of your meals. Additionally, cooking in larger batches means you can enjoy leftovers for lunch, and for a sweet treat, consider stewing some fruit for dessert, saving some for breakfast the next day.

Find a activity that is enjoyable and social

It's easy to feel a bit sluggish and less motivated to stay active. Winter doesn't have to mean hibernation. In fact, it's the perfect time to explore some fun indoor activities that keep you moving and socialising. Why not join a team or sign up for a physical activity program? There's lots of indoor activities to embrace over winter, such as yoga, bowling, dancing, soccer and so on. The key is making your winter activity enjoyable and social.

Stay in and get moving

Winter is the perfect time to cosy up on the couch, but let's be honest, too much sitting is not healthy. Get active around the house. Don't want to miss your favourite show? Try jogging or skipping on the spot or even just stretching while you watch. Try getting active gardening, cleaning, washing the dog or dancing. Have fun getting physical in the comfort of your warm home.

Use an activity tracker to make sure you're still getting your steps up. Set a target to achieve the same amount of steps you would complete over the warmer months.

Rug up and get moving

Keep an eye on the weather and if it's not raining, get out outside and get moving. Once you get moving you'll warm up. When you're out and about look for incidental ways to exercise walk or cycle to the local shops instead of driving the car. Use the stairs instead of the lift or escalator.



Simple hygiene tips

As winter rolls in, so does the season of sniffles and sneezes. Keeping yourself healthy is more important than ever, and a few simple hygiene practices can make a world of difference.

Wash your hands
Germs collect on your hands as you go about everyday life. When you touch your eyes, nose or mouth, the germs can spread to these vulnerable areas. So one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading illness is to frequently wash your hands.

- Clean your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand rub/sanitiser.[3]
- Hand washing helps prevent the spread of infections such as common colds, flu, COVID-19 and gastroenteritis.[1]

Cover coughs and sneezes
It is important that you use disposable tissues rather than your hands or a handkerchief when you cough or sneeze. Make sure you always:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or use your elbow, not your hands[2]
- put the tissue into a closed-top bin as soon as possible
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, or handling food until you have washed your hands.[4]

Stay home
Avoid contact with others if you are sick and if others are sick, keep your distance as much as possible.[5] Certain groups are considered at higher risk for severe influenza (flu) complications and are therefore prioritised for vaccination. These include: children aged 6 months to 5 years, adults aged 65 and over, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, pregnant women, people with chronic medical conditions, residents of aged care and long-term residential facilities, and people experiencing homelessness.[6]

A very simple way to reduce the spread of germs is to stand or sit away from people when you or they are coughing or sneezing (at least 1 metre – about an arm's length).

Cleaning frequently touched surfaces
Clean your home and work surfaces regularly to help get rid of germs, this includes high-touch surfaces:

- phones
- door handles
- light switches
- children's toys
- desk/countertops
- keyboards.

Clean surfaces using a product suitable for each surface, following instructions on the product label.[7]



Flu season myths vs facts

With flu season upon us, it's time to tackle some common myths and arm ourselves with the facts to stay healthy this winter!

Myth: The flu vaccine gives you the flu

Fact: You definitely cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine. The flu vaccine is a small dose of parts of the inactivated (killed) flu virus - it contains no live flu virus at all - so it cannot give you the flu. Some people who get the flu shot may experience redness and swelling around the area of the injection, which normally disappears within a few days. A small percentage of people may also suffer short-lived fever, tiredness and symptoms similar to the flu but this is not the flu. [7]

Myth: The flu is not a serious illness

Fact: The flu is a highly contagious disease that can lead to severe complications, including hospitalisation, pneumonia and death. For young children and the elderly, the flu is one of the most common causes of hospitalisation for vaccine preventable diseases in South Australia. Pregnant women have an increased risk of complications because part of their immune system is naturally suppressed during pregnancy and their 'expanded size' can make breathing more difficult. [7]

Myth: You don't need to be vaccinated if you've had the flu in the past

Fact: Vaccination each year is important as the strains of flu virus circulating in our community change. Some strains can cause more serious illness than others. No one is totally immune to the different strains of the flu virus. Most people can get sick with the flu multiple times over the course of their life. The flu spreads easily from person to person through breathing, coughing and sneezing. The virus can also be spread when people touch other people and objects (for example a door handle or toy) which have tiny droplets of saliva from others coughing or sneezing. [8]

Myth: The flu vaccine causes severe reactions or side effects

Fact: The flu vaccine is very safe. Most people experience no symptoms after their vaccination. However, some people may experience some redness or soreness at the area where the needle was given. Mild flu-like symptoms may occur in some people and usually last no more than a day or two.

These symptoms can include:
- mild fever
- headache
- aching muscles

Due to a smaller body and surface area, children (especially if under five) may develop higher body temperatures than adults after having the flu shot. This can sometimes result in convulsions caused by the fever. Rarely, flu vaccination can result in an immediate allergic reaction, which can very rarely be severe.

Immunisation providers are trained to ask about potential allergic reactions before giving the vaccine and to treat such reactions if they occur following the vaccination. People who have had a severe allergic reaction to the influenza vaccine in the past should not be vaccinated again. [7]

Myth: Getting a flu vaccine every year weakens your immune system

Fact: The vaccine prepares and boosts your immune system to help fight the virus if you are exposed to it. People who get the flu shot every year are better protected against flu than those who do not get vaccinated. [7]

Myth: The vaccine doesn't work because I got vaccinated last year and still got the flu

Fact: There are many different strains of flu and one vaccine cannot protect against them all. The vaccine contains the most common strains of flu expected to occur in Australia each year. As these strains may change each year, a person needs to get vaccinated every year to be protected against new strains.

The vaccine takes up to two weeks to work. It is important to remember that the vaccine does not contain any 'live' strains of the viruses and can not give you the flu.

For those who get the flu, despite being vaccinated, their illness is usually much less severe. There are also many other illnesses that can cause flu-like illnesses. The flu vaccine does not protect against these illnesses. It may also be possible that you caught the flu virus before, or just after, you were vaccinated. [7]

Myth: It is not necessary to get immunised against the flu every year because previous vaccinations will protect me

Fact: It is important to get re-vaccinated against flu every year as the flu strains can change. New vaccines are made each year based on the strains most likey to be present during the coming flu season. Even if the main flu strains do not change, yearly vaccination is still recommended as immunity from flu vaccination is not long lasting.

Quadrivalent influenza vaccines (QIV) are available in Australia made by different pharmaceutical companies. QIV contain antigens of four virus strains (two influenza A strains and two influenza B strain).

For people aged 65 years and over, specially formulated trivalent vaccines (TIV) are available containing three strains (two A and one B). These vaccines offer better protection for the elderly against influenza infection. [7]

Refrences:

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