

Look after your lungs this winter



1 Watch out for colds and flu

Catching a cold or another infection can trigger your asthma or cause a flare-up of your lung condition. If you catch a cold, watch out for symptoms that get worse like breathlessness, coughing and wheezing. Make sure you know what to do if you become breathless and you know the phone number for your out of hours GP or specialist, in case you need to contact them.

Washing your hands regularly, avoiding friends or family who are sick and staying away from crowded indoor places can help you avoid catching colds and flu.

Feeling unwell? Don't wait!

If you feel unwell or think your lung condition symptoms are getting worse, follow your self-management plan. (This should include what to do and who to contact if your symptoms flare up.) Or get advice from your pharmacist, doctor or nurse before it gets more serious. Don't wait for your symptoms to get better on their own – act as soon as you can.

2 Get a flu vaccine every year

Flu can be a serious illness, especially if you're living with a lung condition. Ask your GP or pharmacist about getting a free flu vaccine and to discuss any concerns. Getting the flu vaccine reduces the risk that you will need to be admitted to hospital. [AsthmaAndLung.org.uk/flu-vaccine](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/flu-vaccine)

3 Get a one-off anti-pneumonia vaccination

If you've not had one, ask about the free pneumonia jab. The pneumonia vaccine protects against serious pneumococcal infections. It is recommended if you have certain lung conditions. You should also be offered one if you're over 65. Read more about the pneumonia vaccine if you have a lung condition at [AsthmaAndLung.org.uk/pneumonia-prevention](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/pneumonia-prevention)

4 Take care of your wellbeing

In winter, some people feel more tired, sleep more, put on weight and generally feel low. 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 also important in winter to eat a nutritionally balanced and varied diet. A healthy diet contains essential nutrients to help prevent infections and keep you and your lungs healthy. If you are struggling to afford food, you don't have to go hungry. Read about how to get help with food costs at [AsthmaAndLung.org.uk/food-help](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/food-help)

5 Stay warm

Keep your home warm

We know this might be more difficult this year. 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 and learn more about winter fuel payments at [AsthmaAndLung.org.uk/heating-help](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/heating-help)

Try and heat your home to at least 18°C (64°F). If you can, keep your bedroom at 18°C (64°F) when you're trying to sleep and 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 hats. Have a blanket or shawl to hand as well.

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. Read our tips at [AsthmaAndLung.org.uk/indoor-air](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/indoor-air)

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

Keep active

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

6 Look after your airways and lungs

When you're out and about

Check the weather before you go out. If it's too cold or windy for you, or you are not feeling well or are having trouble breathing, stay indoors and try to keep warm.

If you have a reliever inhaler, always make sure to carry it with you. Cold air can tighten your airways, making it harder for you to breathe.

When out and about in cold weather, make sure to keep your head, hands and feet warm by wearing a hat, gloves and even an extra pair of socks. Try protecting your lungs and airways from cold air by wearing a scarf over your nose and mouth, if it feels comfortable to do so.

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

If you smoke, get support to quit

Quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your health. Winter is the best time to quit, as winter brings an increase in the risk of complications like chest infections, heart attacks and stroke. Read more about quitting smoking at [AsthmaAndLung.org.uk/stop-smoking](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/stop-smoking)

Get in touch with Asthma + Lung UK's helpline for more advice

They can also talk to you about extra help you might be entitled to during cold weather, such as winter fuel payments. **Helpline:** 0300 222 5800 | Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

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