# Experts unveil comprehensive strategies to boost immunity for winter health



As the colder months approach, the onset of cold and flu season becomes an inevitable concern for many. Preparing our bodies to withstand the increased circulation of viruses is essential to maintaining health through the winter. Experts emphasise a holistic approach combining hydration, vaccination, nutrition, exercise, stress management, and sleep hygiene to help strengthen the immune system and reduce the risk of illness.

Hydration is foundational to this preparation, though it can be deceptively challenging in winter. Reduced thirst often leads to inadequate fluid intake, while cold air and indoor heating contribute to dehydration by drying out the skin and mucous membranes. Dr Naveed Asif, a GP at London General Practice, underscores the importance of "adequate hydration and rest" as primary defences against illness, recommending water and herbal teas to maintain fluid balance. Complementing this, research from Massachusetts General Hospital highlights the benefits of warm fluids and water-rich foods during winter, which not only support immune function but also aid in nutrient transport and waste removal, vital for overall health.

Staying current with vaccinations forms a critical line of defence. Dr Mohammed Enayat, founder of the longevity clinic HUM2N, advises that those eligible should secure their flu vaccine early, noting particular importance for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, pregnant women, and people with chronic conditions. He also points out the convenience and added protection of receiving COVID-19 boosters alongside the flu jab when offered, a practice aligned with public health strategies to reduce winter respiratory illness burdens.

A well-stocked medicine cabinet also plays a practical role. Asif recommends keeping essentials like paracetamol or ibuprofen handy to manage common symptoms such as fever and body aches, along with decongestants and saline nasal sprays to alleviate congestion. Importantly, he notes that affordable generic versions are as effective as branded ones, encouraging accessibility.

Good hygiene remains a cornerstone of infection prevention. Proper, thorough handwashing is vital, far surpassing the minimal effect of a quick rinse under cold water. Following the "Catch It, Bin It, Kill It" slogan by covering coughs and sneezes and avoiding touching one's face helps limit germ transmission. Complementing this, Enayat advises carrying hand sanitiser and regularly disinfecting frequently touched surfaces to curb the spread of pathogens.

Dietary choices are another pillar in supporting immune defence. Dr Dave Nichols, NHS GP and MyHealthChecked advisor, highlights the role of colourful fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants and vitamin C. He also emphasises fermented foods like yogurt and kimchi that promote gut health, alongside anti-inflammatory staples such as garlic, ginger, and turmeric—all contributing to a robust immune system.

Stress management is equally significant. Chronic stress elevates cortisol levels, which can suppress immune function. Nichols advocates for meditation, breathing exercises, and spending time in nature as practical methods to reduce stress and promote immune health.

Physical activity remains crucial, despite the lure of indoor warmth during winter. Dr Donald Grant from The Independent Pharmacy notes the immune-boosting effects of exercise, which increases white blood cell production and reduces inflammation. Staying active also helps combat seasonal affective disorder and prevents winter weight gain. Outdoor exercise offers additional benefits such as improved endurance and the transformation of energy-storing white fat into calorie-burning brown fat, according to research from Harvard Health. Activities like brisk walking, jogging, or winter sports can be invigorating, but appropriate clothing, hydration, and awareness of hypothermia symptoms are essential to ensure safety. When conditions are too harsh, indoor alternatives such as yoga or fitness apps provide valuable options.

Finally, prioritising sleep enables the body to repair and defend itself. As Grant explains, cytokines—proteins that protect against infection and inflammation—are produced during sleep, alongside antibodies crucial in fighting illness. Achieving seven to nine hours of uninterrupted rest, and reducing blue light exposure before bedtime to improve sleep quality, are practical steps to bolster immunity.

In summary, confronting the winter months with a comprehensive strategy that includes hydration, vaccination, diet, hygiene, stress reduction, physical activity, and adequate sleep offers the best chance of maintaining health during the cold and flu season. Experts agree that these measures collectively enhance the body's resilience, helping individuals navigate winter with reduced risk of illness.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/health-and-families/meditation-london-covid-the-independent-b2820046.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/health-and-families/meditation-london-covid-the-independent-b2820046.html), [[2]](https://www.massgeneral.org/news/article/the-importance-of-winter-hydration)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/health-and-families/meditation-london-covid-the-independent-b2820046.html)
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* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/health-and-families/meditation-london-covid-the-independent-b2820046.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/health-and-families/meditation-london-covid-the-independent-b2820046.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.massgeneral.org/news/article/the-importance-of-winter-hydration> - As temperatures drop, maintaining hydration becomes challenging due to reduced thirst and increased risk of dehydration. Cold air can dry out the skin, and indoor heating further contributes to fluid loss. Dehydration can lead to kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and constipation. Water is essential for transporting nutrients, removing waste, supporting the immune system, and regulating body temperature. To stay hydrated in winter, consider drinking warm fluids like herbal teas, adding fruit to water for flavour, carrying a water bottle, consuming water-rich foods, and limiting caffeine and alcohol intake.
3. <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/getting-active/how-to-stay-active-in-cold-weather> - Exercising in cold weather offers distinct advantages, such as reduced heat and humidity, potentially longer workouts, and exposure to sunlight, which can improve mood and provide vitamin D. Regular physical activity boosts immunity, helping to prevent bacterial and viral infections. Recommended outdoor activities include brisk walking, jogging, hiking, and winter sports like ice skating and cross-country skiing. To stay safe, dress in layers, protect extremities, stay hydrated, and be aware of hypothermia symptoms. If conditions are severe, consider indoor exercises like yoga or using fitness apps.
4. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-wonders-of-winter-workouts> - Exercising in colder temperatures offers several benefits, including improved endurance and efficiency. Cold weather may enhance endurance as the body expends less energy on cooling, allowing for more efficient workouts. Additionally, cold-weather exercise can transform white fat into calorie-burning brown fat. Exposure to sunlight during outdoor activities can help combat seasonal affective disorder. However, it's important to be cautious of hypothermia risks and to dress appropriately for cold-weather workouts.
5. <https://www.texasheart.org/heart-health/heart-information-center/topics/cold-weather-exercise/> - Maintaining an exercise routine during cold weather offers extra benefits, such as combating the 'winter blues' and boosting energy levels. Regular physical activity in colder months can strengthen the immune system, potentially reducing the frequency of winter colds. It's important to dress appropriately for cold-weather workouts and to be aware of the risks associated with exercising in cold temperatures.
6. <https://healthysd.gov/physical-activity-cold-weather/> - Exercising in cold weather can be challenging, but with proper precautions, it offers numerous health benefits. Dressing in layers, staying hydrated, and protecting extremities are essential. It's also important to be aware of the signs of hypothermia and to adjust exercise routines based on weather conditions. If temperatures are extremely low, consider indoor activities to maintain physical activity levels.
7. <https://www.gardenstatepain.com/post/staying-active-in-cold-weather-why-its-great-for-your-body> - Staying active during cold weather provides several health benefits, including preventing joint and muscle stiffness, boosting the immune system, improving mood and mental health, supporting cardiovascular health, and preventing winter weight gain. Regular exercise in colder months can enhance overall well-being and help maintain a healthy lifestyle.