

Surviving winter chills

Staying healthy throughout the year is very important, but during winter, you need to take extra care. There are lots of medicines and remedies to help get you better once you are sick but prevention is always better than cure...and often less expensive!

Here are a few things that can be done to keep you and your family healthy.

- Have breakfast – Your body will be better equipped to fight off infection and illness. Oats is a great breakfast option since its high in fibre and has a low GI – which means it will keep you fuller for longer!
- Feed your immune system – there are certain micro-nutrients found in foods that are essential to your body to fight off germs and viruses such as:

Citrus fruits

Oranges, grapefruit and naartjies are all packed with protective nutrients such as vitamin C and bioflavonoids that help to ward off winter colds and flu. Vegetable sources of vitamin C include tomatoes and green pepper.

The pumpkin family

Butternut, pumpkins and squash are great sources of beta-carotene, which is a powerful antioxidant and it helps increase the number of germ fighting cells in our bodies.

Probiotic foods

It's a highly publicised fact that probiotic supplements and foods such as yoghurt are good for you. Probiotics are cultures of the "good" bacteria that occur naturally in the gastro-intestinal tract (GI) of healthy human beings. They compete with harmful bacteria in the GI tract for food and prevent them from weakening and entering the body.

Fish

Fish is a healthy source of zinc and omega 3 fatty acids, both of which will give your health a boost and omega 3 fatty acids also help keep your heart healthy.

Garlic

Garlic has antibacterial and anti-viral effects and seems to be beneficial in the treatment of chest infections. However, in order to benefit from the effects of garlic it's best eaten raw and in large amounts. Alternatively you could try garlic tablets.

Lots of liquids

If you do get sick this winter, it's essential to get in plenty of liquid to help keep your body hydrated. Drinking lots of water may seem daunting but fluids such as teas, especially rooibos - which has lots of antioxidants and chamomile - which has antibacterial properties, can also be used to help keep you hydrated.

- Always wash your hands - after coughing, after sneezing, after using the toilet, before and after eating, and any time your hands come into contact with surfaces like desks, phones or doorknobs. It seems simple but cold and flu viruses are spread by physical contact, so by following this easy, obvious step you largely decrease your risk of getting ill. You may not always be near a bathroom so try to carry an alcohol-based sanitizer in your hand bag or at your desk to kill germs.
- Get some fresh air - in cold weather, heaters can dry out the air and your body, so stepping outside is essential to staying healthy. Germs spread in dry, stuffy rooms, so be sure to air out your room. As nice as staying tucked away in bed sounds, a quick trip outside can help. If you really feel you need the heater on, be sure to place a glass or shallow bowl of water in front of it so that the air doesn't dry out as much.
- Stay active – once winter sets in, our exercise routines usually go out the window. However, it's important that you do not over-exert yourself since the cold weather strains

the body, particularly the heart. If you do strenuous activity outside, take frequent breaks. If however, you're already ill, don't exercise until you have completely recovered

- Dress warmly - most of our heat loss during cold weather is through our scalp, so caps and beanies are very important and even better than headbands or earmuffs. Fingers and toes are especially susceptible to cold, so make sure you have warm gloves and proper footwear.
- Hot foods such as chilli peppers, hot mustard, pepper, onions, and garlic contain substances called "mucolytics" (similar to over-the-counter wet cough syrups) that thin thick mucus that accumulates in the sinuses and breathing passages, thereby helping you breath easier.
- Don't forget home-made chicken soup! Research has shown that chicken soup may contain a number of substances with beneficial medicinal activity and has a mild anti-inflammatory effect to help resolve early symptoms of colds and flu. Refer to our heart healthy chicken soup recipe below.

Written by Melissa Petersen, Dietician at The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA.

Chicken Noodle Soup with Vegetables

(Serves 6)

Ingredients:

2 chicken breasts, filleted and skinned
1.5 l (6 cups) light chicken stock
100ml (2/5 cup) noodles in small shapes
1 carrot, diced
1 stalk celery, sliced without leaves
4 spring onions, sliced
1 cup each of other selected vegetables, suitably chopped
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1 large lettuce leaf, finely shredded

Directions:

Cut chicken into small chunks. Bring stock to the boil in a large pot. Add chicken, noodles, carrot, celery, spring onions and selected vegetables. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for 5 to 6 minutes. Remove from heat. Check flavouring and the texture of the vegetables, which should still be slightly crisp. Stir in lettuce and serve at once.

Microwave:

Microwave stock in a large, covered casserole dish for 10 to 12 minutes on HIGH (100%). Add other ingredients, cover, then microwave on HIGH (100%) for 4 to 5 minutes. Complete as above.

Nutritional Information Per Serving:

Energy	421 kJ
Total Fat	2g
Saturated Fat	0.5g
Polyunsaturated Fat	0.5g
Cholesterol	28mg
Fibre	2g
Sodium	35mg

Recipe courtesy of the Hart á la Carte recipe book (available only in Afrikaans)