

Editorial**Common Winter Illness- A Seasonal Suffering- An Editorial**

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As Late-Autumn is preparing to take farewell, winter is coming with its charming weather of foggy mornings and chilly evenings. Winter is the season of fun and celebration. It's the time to rejoice! It's the season of endless cups of tea and coffee. It is also that time of the year filled with enjoying holidays, exciting get-togethers, holiday parties and picnic, family dinners and the wedding ceremony.

However, as we welcome and get ready for the charming winters, it is also important that we don't forget the unpleasant side of the season, such as the fall in temperature and other related factors that can lead to a multitude of health problems, called **winter diseases** or seasonal diseases.

People get sick with changing seasons; the winter season brings a lot of diseases with the onset of low temperatures. Some people such as very young, very old or with a compromised immune system, are more

susceptible to catching these common diseases. Some precautions can keep these diseases at bay to get most out of this season.

The shift in temperature causes viruses to flourish which then spread diseases. People are indoors more often, allowing viruses to pass more easily from one person to another. And the cold, dry air may weaken resistance. Although these virus diseases may occur throughout the year, common colds, flus, sore throat and other respiratory illnesses such as sinusitis are more common in winter months ^[1]. Pre-existing respiratory conditions such as COPD or asthma become worse during winter season causing more distress to the patients; winter season becomes miserable to these persons.

Some bacterial infections such as Streptococcal Sore Throat, Pneumonia and Acute Ear Infection are also more common in winter season.

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As the environment cools, our body temperature usually experiences a drop; at the same time, the body is adjusting to the new climate through different processes. As a result, the change in the process results in a number of diseases e.g. heart attack.

Most of us are unaware of the fact that winter is one of the prime seasons for heart attacks. As the temperature falls, the arteries become constricted making it difficult for the heart to pump the blood^[2]. The heart also has to work harder to maintain body temperature when it's cold. Pain and stiffness of joints and muscles are common in during winter season; although there is no scientific evidence to these. It is most commonly seen in arthritis patients making their life miserable.

Some minor ailments such as dry skin, itchy skin, chapped lips and cracked heels are universal in winter season.

There are a strong relation between weather and mind. A number of people feel stressed in winter and some other are depressed. This is called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and it can lead to a lot of health issues related to these.

Some precautions can prevent or at least reduce the incidence and suffering of people.

PREVENTION

The cold weather and shorter days during the winter can make you lose the motivation to exercise and stay healthy and fit. This could lead to a weak immune system posing a greater risk of contracting the diseases. It is better to prevent them from occurring than going for the treatment options, and the best way to do that is to plan ahead and be careful. Here are some tips to help you stay safe from cold weather diseases.

- **Healthy Diet:** Eating a well-balanced diet including whole grains, lean meats, fish, poultry, legumes, nuts and seeds, herbs and spices as well as plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables are essential to boost the immune system. We can also have an optimum intake of foods rich in vitamin

C, as it helps to strengthen our immune system and to keep our body healthy.

- **Vitamin D:** Go outdoor and soak in the warm sun, our body requires vitamin D - which is essential for maintaining health and immunity, Vitamin D is also required to regulate the mood.

- **Drink green tea:** Drinking green tea can relax your body and help you rest better.

- **Exercise:** Physical activity is an important aspect to keep one fit throughout the winter. Daily routine of yoga or any form of physical activity will help to keep you warm and boosts the immune system improving defense against seasonal ailments like flu and colds.

- **Water:** Drink required amount of water every day and stay hydrated. Water helps to clean our system and remove toxins, carry nutrients to the body cells and help balance body fluid.

- **Sleep:** A good amount of sleep helps to keep the body's immune system healthy, eliminates stress hormone cortisol and burns calories. Sleep is non-negotiable factor for maintaining good health.

- **Hygiene:** Maintain good hygiene, wash hands to keep the bacteria and viruses to stop spread.

- **Quit Smoking:** Smoking makes individual susceptible towards respiratory infections in winter hence one should quit smoking.

- **Clothing:** Wear woolen clothes to keep you warm when you go out.

- **Checkup Your Health Regularly:** Winter season precautions include a regular health checkup. As cold weather triggers health problems like asthma, flu, sore throat, painful joints, and increased risk of heart attacks as low temperature makes blood pressure to rise and puts more pressure on heart. Preventive health checkup is best way to beat the winter diseases and to enjoy good health even in the chilled weather.

- **Practice meditation:** Meditation helps you keep away from winter blues, anxiety and stress.
- **Vaccination:** A single dose of pneumococcal vaccine can prevent pneumococcal pneumonia and influenza vaccine flu, but influenza vaccine should be taken yearly^[3].
- **Skin Trouble:** Skin care in winter is a must include moisturising, applying sun protection creams and increasing intake of water.
- **Heart Attacks:** Experts suggest to follow the following advice-
 - Stay warm in your home. Heat the main rooms you use to at least 18⁰C and use a hot water bottle or electric blanket to keep warm in bed
 - Wrap up warm when you go out and wear a hat, scarf and gloves.
 - People over the age of 30 should avoid exhausting themselves in winter season
 - Also, do not overeat food during winters and preferably eat in small quantities.

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