Weathering winter with asthma

Cold weather is here. Winter can cause problems for people with lung diseases. That’s because of:

**Low temps.** Cold, dry air can irritate the lungs and trigger coughing and shortness of breath. To help counter the cold, people with asthma can:
- Wear a scarf over their mouth and nose when they’re outside. This will warm the air before it enters their lungs.
- Keep their quick-relief inhaler with them.

**Outdoor air pollution.** Air pollution can be higher in the winter. It’s a good idea to stay in when the air is unhealthy to breathe. You can check air quality forecasts at [airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov).

**Fireplace smoke.** Breathing smoke from a fire also makes asthma worse. If there’s a fire burning, sitting well away from it helps.

**Seasonal scents.** During the holidays, many people burn scented candles. Strong odors can stir up asthma trouble.

**Colds and the flu.** Winter is part of flu season, and the flu can make asthma worse. Colds can too. It’s good to wash hands often, and try to avoid close contact with people who may be sick.

**Holiday travel.** People who travel for the holidays should remember to pack asthma medicines, a copy of their prescriptions and their asthma action plan.

**Health care doesn’t take a holiday**

It can be easy to overlook medications and doctor’s appointments at this time of year. People should do their best to stay on track — and reach out to their care manager or doctor if they have any questions or need help.

**Sources:** American Lung Association (www.lung.org); American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (www.acaai.org)
How to make it through the holidays

The holidays can be stressful for the healthiest people. They can prove to be an even tougher time for people with a chronic illness. People should keep in mind that they can opt out of any holiday events they don’t feel up to attending. It’s OK to say no. When they do take part, they can:  
• Let someone else take on hosting duties.  
• Plan in advance how they want to spend their time — and with whom.  
• Take breaks from the social scene if they feel themselves running low on energy.  
• Feeling tired? It’s OK to take a nap.  
• Avoid alcohol. It can worsen bad moods or feelings.  
• Take care of themselves by eating balanced meals.  
• Give themselves permission to express their emotions. People shouldn’t try to force a happy face if they’re really feeling down.  
• Try taking a walk when the sun’s out. Gray days can bring on seasonal affective disorder — a type of depression. Getting out in the sun can brighten their mood.  
• Get plenty of rest so they have the energy for favorite events.

Keeping in touch

In the bustle of the holidays, people shouldn’t let their health fall by the wayside. Their primary care provider and care manager can answer their questions and point them to tools that make managing their health easier. Those include mobile apps to track blood pressure, cholesterol, medications, daily activity or calories. If people feel stressed or overwhelmed by their health, they should reach out. They’re not alone.

Get the shot, not the flu

Just about everyone who’s 6 months of age or older needs a flu shot. That’s especially true for people with a chronic illness. The best time to get a shot is before the flu starts spreading in your community. That’s hard to predict. It’s probably best to get the shot as soon as it’s available in your area. Remember: You can’t get the flu from a shot. It’s among the best ways to avoid getting the flu.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve

If you are a caregiver, ask your loved one’s care manager about their needed services as well as services you might need as a caregiver. For example, you may feel overwhelmed, sad or burned out. The care manager can provide information and referrals for support.

Sources: Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org); American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org); National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org)