

WELLBEINGS AFRICA

Winter Wellness Guide 2026



Your practical guide to staying healthy, active, and well
this winter season (and beyond).

BUILD YOUR WINTER DEFENSE

Winter brings more than chilly mornings; it also introduces a seasonal spike in colds, flu, and respiratory infections.

What's on your plate?

A nutrient-dense diet is your first and most powerful line of defense. Aim to include a variety of:

- Colourful vegetables and citrus fruits
- Lean proteins, wholegrains, and legumes
- Probiotic-rich foods like kefir or Greek yoghurt
- Healthy fats, nuts, and seeds



Key nutrients for winter immunity

- **Vitamin C:** Immune cell function & antioxidants. Try oranges, guavas, peppers, broccoli
- **Vitamin D:** Immune regulation; drops in winter. Try sunlight, eggs, fatty fish, fortified dairy
- **Zinc:** Immune cell development. Try meat, lentils, pumpkin seeds, chickpeas

Supplements can support your immune system but should complement (not replace) a balanced diet. Always check with your doctor before starting new supplements, especially if you have underlying health conditions.

STRESS & WINTER ILLNESSES

Get a handle on stress. Seriously.



We ALL get stressed at various times in our lives. Hectic deadlines, financial worries, losing a loved one, family problems, and many more elements can contribute to everyday stressors. Consistent stress however, starts to take a toll on your immune system.

A simple breathing pause can help calm your nervous system and improve focus:

- Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of four.
- Hold for a moment.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of six.
- Repeat this a few times, especially when you feel tense or overwhelmed.

Tip: workplace stress

Learn to manage your workload effectively. Break tasks into manageable chunks, prioritise your work based on importance and deadlines and delegate when necessary. Don't be afraid to say no to additional responsibilities if you're already feeling overwhelmed.

Good to know

For some, the weight can feel overwhelming; constant pressure that affects every part of your life. This is what chronic stress feels like – big, consistent, and too much to manage. Get help from a medical professional/therapist when things feel like this.

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE FLU

Many of us mistake a flu for the cold or other respiratory illness. However, the flu is usually far worse. It's a viral infection that spreads quickly. In most cases, the flu will clear up on its own. However, in some instances, the flu can be dangerous, leading to complications such as pneumonia or dehydration.

1

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Because the flu viruses evolve each season, each year's flu vaccine is designed to fight the most recent strain. Therefore, the immunity provided by a flu shot is only temporary, lasting about a year.

Even if you get the flu after being immunised, the vaccine can make your symptoms less severe and help you recover quickly.

3

The flu vaccine is safe for children from six months and up and could even save a child's life. Adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with chronic conditions are also at high risk of flu complications.

4

Some people insist they've caught the flu after getting a flu shot. The flu shot can't make you sick because it does not contain a live virus. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to start preventing flu, so if you get sick after getting vaccinated, chances are you had the flu before getting vaccinated.

5



DON'T SKIP THE FLU SHOT

The flu virus evolves each year, and so does the vaccine. Scientists update it annually to match the most likely circulating strains, training your immune system to fight the virus before it takes hold.

Even if you do get sick, vaccination can make your symptoms milder and help you recover faster.

The flu vaccine is especially important for:

- Adults 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- Children under five
- People living with chronic conditions such as asthma or diabetes



Common flu symptoms

- Fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, body pains, muscle aches, headaches, tiredness.
- See a doctor if you experience difficulty breathing, chest pain, persistent high fever, severe dehydration, confusion, or symptoms that worsen instead of improving.

Can I treat a cold and flu with antibiotics?

If you have a cold or the flu, you don't need an antibiotic. Colds and flu are caused by viruses, so an antibiotic isn't going to help. Further, it's not a good idea to keep using antibiotics because you could build up a resistance and cause yourself other unnecessary health issues. With both a cold and the flu, you need plenty of rest and fluids.

And don't forget, the flu vaccine comes out each year and can go a long way in managing your symptoms if you do get sick.

HYGIENE MATTERS

How often do you really stop to consider your hands? They touch your computer, your face, food, surfaces, your cellphone, the TV remote, cupboards, taps, door handles, and a hundred other things each day.

Now imagine all the little unseen hitchhikers catching a ride on those hands – yes, we mean germs and bacteria.

The hidden world of bacteria

Did you know that the average hand can hold up to 150 types of bacteria at any time? It's like a little world happening in your hands. These bacteria (both harmless and harmful) can impact our immune system, which is why good hand hygiene is essential.



- Regularly wipe down your phone. Most of us use our phones throughout the day, transferring germs from surfaces and then touch the phone to our skin.
- Hand sanitisers and soaps help us quickly and effectively clean our hands. Whether it's an alcohol-based gel for a fast clean-up or a soap that covers a wide range of bacteria, these products keep you safe by breaking down and removing germs.
- Use a soft nail brush to gently scrub under and around your nails. Dirt and germs often hide in these small crevices.
- If you're in a busy high-touch environment (like the office), wash or sanitise your hands regularly.
- Carry a small kit with a travel-sized sanitiser or disinfectant wipes.
- Use comfortably warm water instead of cold. Warm water can help loosen oils and dirt more effectively, yet it's gentle enough not to irritate your skin.
- Consider hand lotions or wipes that include natural antimicrobial agents, such as tea tree or eucalyptus oil. An extra layer of defense while also soothing your skin.
- At home or work, keep specific towels or paper towels solely for hand drying. Clean, separate towels reduce the chance of reintroducing germs onto freshly washed hands.

COMMON COLD & FLU MYTHS

Health myths spread as fast as the common cold, but misinformation can be downright harmful.

Feed a cold, starve a fever

A cold is caused by a virus and usually last a few days no matter what you eat. With a fever, it does no good to starve either as you need light, nutritious meals to keep energy levels up to help the body fight the virus. Either way, make sure you get plenty of liquids and rest.



Fake News

Take as much medication as possible to fight a cold

Not really. Rather, drink lots of water, rest and treat the symptoms.

I'm healthy, I don't need a flu vaccine

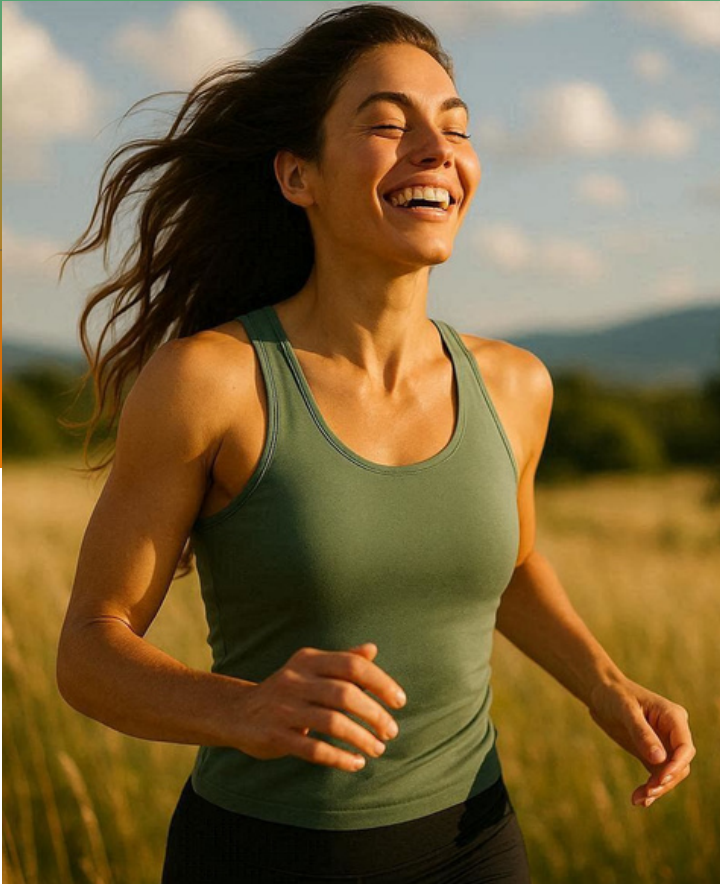
People who manage a chronic illness should certainly get the flu shot, but even "healthy" people can benefit from being vaccinated. Annual vaccination against influenza is recommended for everyone older than 6 months of age, including pregnant women.

Antiviral medication should always be prescribed for flu

False. Treatment for flu is largely directed at reducing the signs and symptoms of flu, like a runny nose, body pains and tiredness. Bed rest, plenty of fluids and symptom relief of cough, congestion and fever are advised.

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Stay safe, stay healthy! WellBeings Africa provides health information for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a healthcare provider for medical concerns.