

Self-Care week – 12-16 November 2018

As a husband, father and GP with a busy life, I know how important it is to take care of one's self. Yes, there are times when we will succumb to illness, but we should all play an active part in keeping ourselves in tip top shape so our bodies are better able to fight off germs.

So, this National Self-care week gives us a great time to think about all the things we can all do to try and stay healthy – particularly over winter.

Self-care is not rocket science. It's quite simply about keeping fit and healthy; understanding when you can look after yourself, when a pharmacist can help, and when to get advice from your GP or another health professional.

When patients come to see me with their long-term conditions, part of that consultation will be a discussion about self-care - helping them to understand the condition and how they can live with it. This might include advice on healthy eating and exercise or quitting smoking and drinking in moderation. The great thing is that it's good for your mental wellbeing too.

To start with, I encourage you to have your influenza (flu) jab. Even if you're usually fit and healthy, having the flu can make you feel like you've been hit by a bus! It can be even worse for people with long term health conditions, older people, younger children and pregnant women. Your GP or local pharmacist can give you more information, or look on the NHS website.

I know it sounds obvious, but try to avoid spreading colds and flu by covering noses and mouth with tissues when coughing or sneezing, throwing these away, and regular hand washing. It really does help!

Get a supply of over the counter remedies in at home, ready for action! Use your pharmacist. They are expert in managing illnesses like colds, sore throats, coughs, sinus infections and ear infections. If they think you do need to see a GP, they will tell you, but for most of these conditions, you do not need a doctor.

If you have a long term condition requiring regular medication, review your supply at home. Have you got enough to see you through a cold spell? You can work with your GP and pharmacist to avoid running out at a time when getting out of the house could be difficult.

When possible, eat regular meals to keep energy levels up and ideally at least one hot meal a day plus plenty of hot drinks. It is also worth thinking about stocking up on tinned or frozen foods if getting out in icy or very cold weather is a concern for you. Some parents of young children and some pregnant women may be eligible for

Healthy Start Vouchers which may help with costs. More information at:
www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Stay as active as you can. Not only is the activity good for your overall health, moving helps to keep you warm. Even chair-based moving like moving arms, hands, or wriggling toes helps.

In terms of clothing, though a big thick jumper is tempting, it's better to go for lots of thin layers of clothing to keep you warm. Do think about wearing a hat and try to wear shoes with good grip so you don't slip on wet pavements, leaves or ice.

If you have a mobile phone, keep it with you all the time. Then you can ring for help if you fall and are injured or can't get up again.

Heat your home as best you can. For some people it is real challenge to get through the winter with the heating bills. If you can't heat all your rooms, heat the living room in the day and your bedroom just before you go to bed. Close curtains and shut doors to keep heat in. It is worth thinking about contacting the Energy Saving Advice service about how to reduce your bills and make your home more energy efficient. This is a government funded telephone advice service.

You may be eligible for:

- Winter Fuel payments (www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment)
- cold weather payments (www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment)
- a warm home discount (www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme/what-youll-get)

Citizens Advice or Age UK are also fantastic organisations to get advice regarding eligibility for additional payments and benefits. For free advice and support for single parents try www.gingerbread.org.uk . For free advice for people living with disability and their families try www.scope.org.uk .

Looking after one another is important—I know you don't need me to tell you that!

Huge numbers of people already check on older neighbours or relatives to make sure they're safe and well. As a GP and member of our community, I am so appreciative of all of the caring that already goes on. If you're worried about an older person, contact a family member, the local council or ring the Age UK helpline on 0800 00 99 66.

If you do become unwell this winter, think about where would be the best place for you to go. If you are not sure where to go sure speak to advisors on 111 or talk to a pharmacist or your GP. The NHS is here to help. I hope we are able to work together to help you stay well though the winter – and beyond!

If you are not sure what changes you can make to help improve your health, the NHS website offers a wealth of information and advice to help you make the best choices about your health and wellbeing. Click on the link and start your journey today. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well>