How to Avoid Getting a Cold With COPD

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

Tips to Help Prevent You From Getting a Cold With COPD

With winter just around the corner, it seems like a good time to talk about the challenges winter imposes on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients. While the onset of the colder months may scare some, there are measures we can put in place to help cope with what winter throws at us.

When we think of winter we think of colds, flus, pneumonia, and the risk these ailments pose to our disease. Winter can also restrict our ability to move around outside and exercise.

With winter being a part of life we cannot change, we have to look at how to best prepare for the arrival of cold weather so we can keep our COPD stable.

If you're wondering how to prevent getting a cold with COPD this winter, keep on reading to find out.

Keep Vaccinations Up to Date

Personally, I have some absolute musts in preparing for winter: having my flu vaccine and ensuring my pneumonia vaccination is up to date. While vaccinations are not a guarantee you will not become ill, they are an important part of your defense against a nasty infection.

Each year scientists are able to improve the effectiveness of the flu vaccine as it can now protect against a number of different strains. It is important to have your vaccination before the onset of the flu season in order to receive the greatest benefits.

Avoidance, Avoidance, Avoidance

Avoiding sick people where possible is important, as you don’t want to expose yourself to becoming ill through someone else’s infection. We have a rule in our household: if a visitor is sick they don’t come in.

While some people may think that’s a little over the top, you have to keep in mind for someone with COPD a chest infection can be catastrophic for their short- and long-term health. We also encourage our family and friends to have their vaccinations up to date, not only for my protection but for their own.

To Supplement or Not to Supplement

Over the years I’ve tried many different vitamins and supplements marketed as a defense for cold and flus and I have not noticed any significant difference.

About four years ago I was put on to a product called Zinc Fix, a powder that can be added to water, which has strengthened my immune system. The reason why I’m a fan of this product is in the last four years I have mostly

avoided any nasty infection.

My wife and I did come down with a bout of pneumonia about two years ago; however, I was only mildly sick for a week and recovered very quickly. Whether that was due to the pneumonia vaccine or the Zinc Fix I'm not sure, but I do know since I've been it I have a stronger immune system.

Be Aware of Your Surroundings

The environment you live in is something you should always be aware of. Specifically, be aware of your COPD triggers.

Winter can mean wood fires, depending on where you live, and the pollution from this for me is an instant trigger to my COPD. When I am outside exercising, I'm well aware of the homes where wood fires are used and consciously avoid them.

Cold and windy conditions are another big trigger for me as these conditions can stir up a lot of man-made and natural pollutants, so I avoid them by remaining indoors on windy days. Remember, if you do go outside, wear adequate clothing to keep yourself warm.

Winter can be a time of year where mold and mildew can form inside and outside your home. Many COPD patients can react to this, as well as other household irritants such as dust.

If your budget allows, having the house thoroughly cleaned inside and out before winter can help ward of potential exacerbations. If money is tight, don't be put off asking family or friends to help you out.

In my occupation, I visit many households every year, and on occasion come across homes full of irritants. There is a noticeable difference in how I feel between those houses that are not so clean compared to my own home, which is spotless.

Remember, a home cleaned regularly is going to be less likely to harbor bacteria, which can cause illness.

Always Be Aware

Going out into the world during the cold and flu season is fraught with danger, but should not be avoided — we just need to be aware. Pay attention to the people around you; if you can see someone who is displaying cold or flu symptoms, then steer clear of them.

Be aware of what you come in contact with, especially in shopping centers. Handrails, door handles and other items that are commonly touched by other people should be avoided.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, as this is an easy way to become contaminated with germs. Take a personal hand sanitizer with you when you're out and about and use it as much as possible.

Don't Skimp on Nutrition and Exercise

Of course, I am going to mention that nutrition and regular exercise is a surefire way to keep your body in infection-fighting mode. Eating good quality nutritious foods will bolster our immune system, while physical activity may help flush bacteria out of our lungs and airways.

This may also reduce your chance of getting a cold, flu, or other illness. When we are looking at prevention and minimizing the risk to becoming sick, we must look at internal and external measures — keeping our bodies in as good as condition as possible while limiting our exposure to conditions that may lead too cold and flus.

The Bottom Line

When we talk about COPD management plans we must include our winter preparations and what we need to do to minimize our risk of picking up infections. It’s a good idea to write down your own winter triggers so each year when the cold comes you will be better prepared.

Have your local clinic set up a reminder call so your flu vaccination is not forgotten, and seek advice from your doctor about other precautions you can take to ensure you stay free of infections.

While there is no one way to guarantee we are cold- and flu-free this winter, we can give ourselves the best possible chance by making the right preparations.