



Mid and South Essex  
Integrated Care  
System



Mid and South Essex

# Our guide to staying well **This Winter**



**#DoYourBitEssex**



# How to stay healthy over the winter months



**Remember, if we all do our bit this winter, then we can help protect ourselves, our loved ones and our local NHS.**

## Welcome to our winter guide to staying healthy!

The winter months can be tough on your health. Viruses like the flu and common cold become more common, cold temperatures make conditions like asthma worse, and severe weather can make it more dangerous to venture outside.

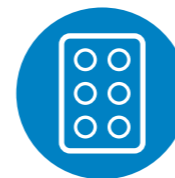
Whatever winter may throw at you, there are things you can do to help keep you safe and keep you well. In this handy guide put together by the

NHS and partners in mid and south Essex, we set out some of the actions you can take look after yourself when the weather gets colder and the nights get longer. You will find tried and tested tips for common winter illnesses, suggestions on how to be prepared and advice on when and where you should seek medical help from a health professional.



## Choose well

Make sure you know which NHS service can help you when you're unwell.



### Self care

Treat minor illness or injury at home including coughs, colds, sore throats, and headaches with over-the-counter medicines from a pharmacy or supermarket.

Use NHS Online (nhs.uk) for advice to help you manage your wellbeing.



### Community pharmacy

Your pharmacy can help you with:

- rashes, eczema and dry skin
- worms and headlice
- dry, itchy and gunky eyes
- minor injuries and pain relief
- insect bites



### NHS 111

NHS 111 can:

- give medical advice
- book a GP appointment overnight and on weekends
- book an emergency dentist or optician appointment
- book you into A&E

go online at 111.nhs.uk or call 111.



### GP and out-of-hours

If you have been unwell for more than 48 hours and your symptoms are getting worse, you can book an appointment at your GP surgery.

You can also see a healthcare professional on weekends and the evenings. Go to your GP practice website or contact the reception team for more information.



### Accident and emergency

Our Emergency Departments (A&E) are for serious and life-threatening conditions:

- severe chest pain
- difficulty breathing
- bleeding you can't stop
- possible broken bones
- loss of consciousness

### Mental health



Mental health support in mid and south Essex includes talking therapies to help support with a range of needs, like anxiety and a number of anxiety related conditions, and also depression. Find out more at: [midandsouthessex.ics.nhs.uk/work/mental-health](https://midandsouthessex.ics.nhs.uk/work/mental-health)

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, you can dial 111 and select option 2 for immediate and specialist support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. For people under the age of 18, they can call NELFT's urgent helpline on 0800 995 1000.

For tips to support mental health and wellbeing in winter, see **page 8**.



# Boost your immunity with a winter vaccination

Colder weather, mixing with more people indoors and lower levels of natural immunity mean the chances of becoming unwell and catching flu, COVID-19 and shingles are high.

The good news is you can do something about it.

## Flu vaccination

The flu vaccination is a safe and effective vaccine and is offered every year on the NHS to help protect people at risk of getting seriously ill from flu.

You can have the NHS flu vaccination at:



your GP surgery



a pharmacy offering the service



some staff are eligible for free flu vaccinations, speak to your employer for more information

The NHS offers FREE vaccinations to those at higher risk of being unwell to help you this winter.

### You can get the flu vaccine for FREE if you:

- are 50 and over
- have certain health conditions
- are pregnant
- are in long-stay residential care
- receive a carer's allowance, or are the main carer for an older or disabled person who may be at risk if you get sick
- live with someone who is more likely to get infections.
- frontline health or social care workers
- Children aged 2 and 3, primary school children and some secondary school children are also eligible for the flu vaccination



## Shingles vaccination

Shingles is caused by a virus called varicella zoster, the same virus that causes chickenpox. When you recover from chickenpox most of this virus is destroyed, but some survives and lies inactive in your body's nervous system.

The virus can then become active again later in life, when your immune system has been weakened by age, stress, illness or certain treatments that can reduce your immunity.

The shingles vaccine helps reduce your risk of developing shingles by boosting your immunity. If you do get shingles, it can reduce how serious the symptoms will be.

You're eligible for the shingles vaccine if you are aged 70 to 79.

The shingles vaccine is not available on the NHS to anyone aged 80 or over because it seems to be less effective in this age group.

## Autumn COVID-19 booster vaccination

An autumn booster vaccination for COVID-19 is also available to certain groups that are at greater risk to COVID-19. These include:



Everyone over the age of 50



Pregnant women



Aged 5 or over with a weakened immune system



Aged 5 or over with a medical condition that puts them at higher risk

You can find out more about the booster and how to book an appointment by visiting [EssexDoYourBit.nhs.uk](https://EssexDoYourBit.nhs.uk) or by calling 119

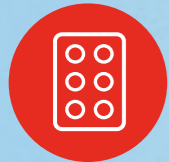




# Keeping a well stocked medicine cupboard

During the winter months, it is always helpful to keep a well-prepared medicines cupboard, to support with self-care for common health problems.

Some essential medicines and products you should keep at home are:



Painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen



Anti-diarrheal medicines



Oral rehydration salts



Indigestion treatment



Anti-histamines



First aid kit



Including plasters, bandages and a thermometer.

## When keeping medicines at home, remember:

Always **follow the directions** on medicine packets and information leaflets, and never take more than the stated dose.

Always keep medicines **out of sight and reach of children** – a high, lockable cupboard in a cool, dry place is ideal.

**Check the expiry dates** on medicines – do not use a medicine that's past its use-by date; take it to a pharmacy, where it can be disposed of safely.



# Looking out for other people

Remember to keep in touch with those around you. If you are fit and healthy, make sure to check in on anyone you know who might need extra help such as older neighbours, friends, and family members. And if you need a bit of extra help, don't be afraid to ask.

Follow these steps to help those around you.

**Keep in touch.** Ask family, friends or neighbours if they need any practical help such as visiting a pharmacy or collecting groceries. The winter weather might make it more difficult for some people to socialise with others, so take the time to say hello and see how people are doing.

Ensure elderly relatives are wearing shoes with good grip – **to prevent trips and fall** (more on preventing falls on [page 12](#)). They should also wrap up in warm clothes if going outside. Wearing a scarf over their mouth will protect them from cold air getting into their lungs.

Make sure they **get their prescriptions** before they run out of medicine. Bad weather might make it more difficult to pick them up. Remember that many pharmacies are closed on bank holidays so make sure to pick up prescriptions in good time over the festive period.

Make sure they **seek help if they need it**. If someone looks like they may be struggling, encourage them to get in contact with NHS services. See [page 3](#) for information on what services can help.



**If you are worried about a relative or elderly neighbour, you can contact your local council or call the Age UK helpline on 0800 678 1602 (8am to 7pm every day).**

**If you concerned someone may have hypothermia, need none urgent medical help or unsure what to do, contact NHS 111.**







# Supporting your mental health during winter

Winter can be a difficult time of year. Cold weather and short days can make us feel more isolated as we can't get out as much. Check out some of our tips for keeping well in winter.

## Find a new activity and meet new people

People who spend time with other people in meaningful activities live longer, boost their mood and have a sense of purpose.

There are many opportunities to meet new people in your area.

Why not sign up with a volunteer group, take part in local community events, or start a new hobby. Keep an eye out on ways to get involved near you, or try visiting a website of a local group, charity or organisation to see how you can sign up.

## Get moving

Whether you take a brisk walk, join a fitness class or spend time house cleaning, getting moving will boost your physical fitness and your wellbeing. Just 30 minutes a day and 150 minutes a week of some form of exercise will help you feel better inside and out.

Even if you can't get outside because of the weather, there are exercises and activities you can do inside like home exercises, swimming at a local pool, or dancing. See [page 10](#) for more tips on keeping fit during winter.

## Remember



If you, a family member or friend are in crisis and need help, please dial NHS 111 and select the option for the mental health crisis line (option 2).



## Improve your sleep

If you are not getting good quality sleep, it can leave you feeling tired and unable to cope and can lead to insomnia that can last months or even years.

Sleep studies show shows the wide-ranging effect sleep deprivation can have on us including anxiety, depression and low mood, as well as obesity and high blood pressure.

Some simple steps can help improve your sleep, such as:



Going to bed and getting up at similar times every day.



Create a restful environment: keep it dark, cool and quiet.



Being more active and moving more during the day can help you sleep better at night.



Avoid caffeine and alcohol, especially close to bedtime as they can stop you falling asleep or reduce the quality of your sleep.



Set aside time before bed to write down worries and a to-do list so you are not thinking about things in bed.



If you can't get to sleep, don't force it. Do something relaxing for a bit but avoid screens as their light can make it harder to sleep.



## Knowing when to seek help



Mental health issues can appear at any time to anyone affect their life and relationships but there are things we can do to help ourselves.

No matter what, it's ok to ask for help, as the sooner you get support and treatment the quicker your recovery.

If you need extra help, you can visit our website ([EssexDoYourBit.nhs.uk](https://EssexDoYourBit.nhs.uk)) to find out more about mental health support near you, or you can speak to your GP practice.





## Keeping active during the colder months

As the temperature drops and the days get shorter, it is always tempting to stay in the warm rather than exercise. However, staying active throughout the colder months can help you beat those seasonal blues and continue to keep you fit and healthily.

### Start taking your first steps.

Do you want to be more active but not sure where to start? Find out about local groups and activities that are right for you by using the Active Essex activity finder and search for

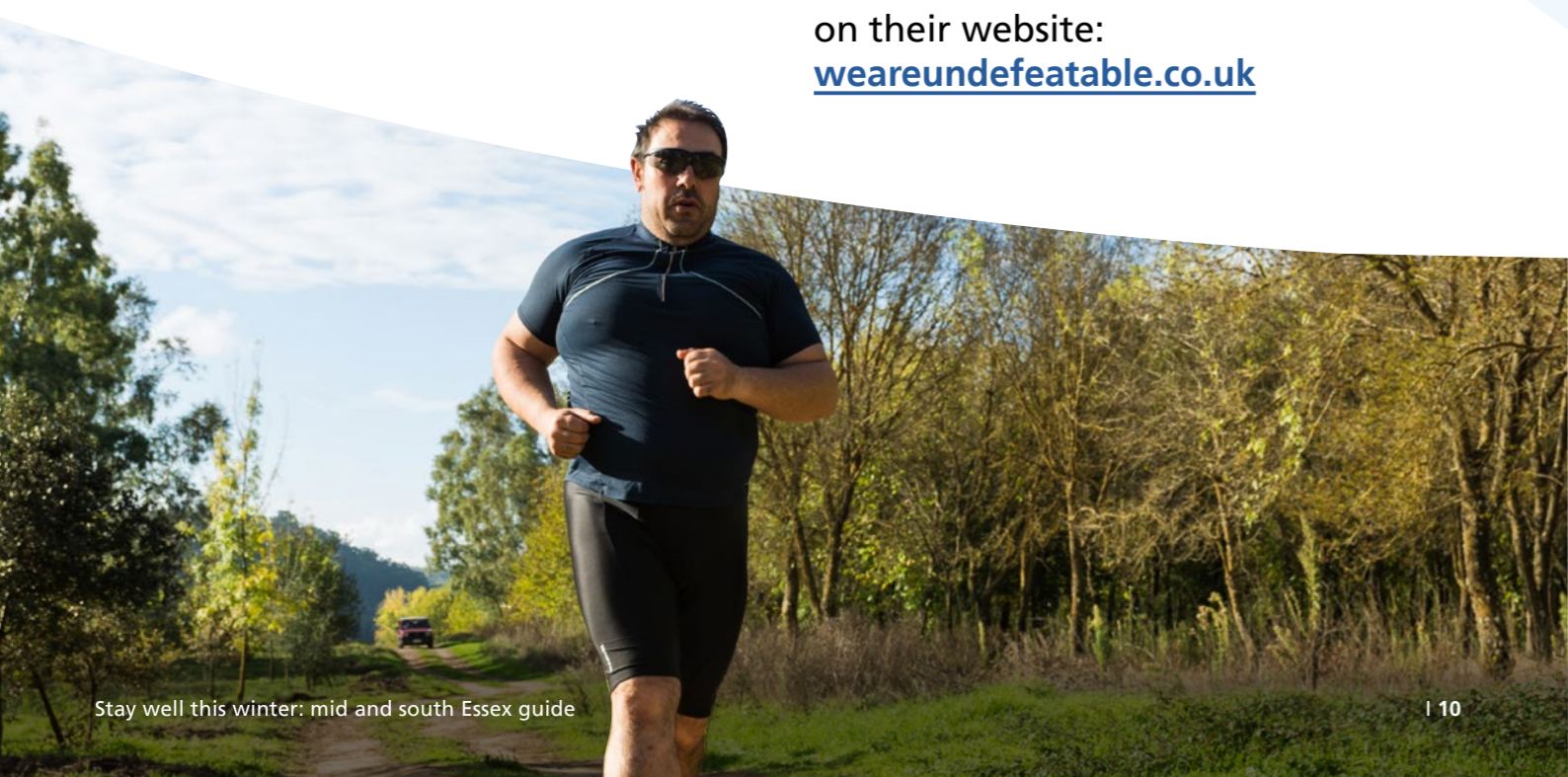
Regular exercise will make you feel energetic, which should make it a little easier to get out of bed on cold dark mornings, some research also suggests that moderate exercise can strengthen the immune system reducing the risk of coughs and colds.

what's going on in your local area. Find out more on the Active Essex website: [activeessex.org/activity-finder](https://activeessex.org/activity-finder)

### Getting active when you live with a long-term health condition

If you live with a long-term health condition, it can be difficult to think about including activity in your daily routine.

However, you can be active, no matter your age or physical condition. 'We are Undefeatable' offer great advice, support and resources for becoming more active whilst living with a long-term health condition. Find out more on their website: [weareundefeatable.co.uk](https://weareundefeatable.co.uk)



## Winter exercising tips

In winter it's not always easy to find the motivation to go outside for exercise. The weather can be cold or conditions might mean that it isn't safe to be outside. In that case there are many ways to get active inside: from local swimming pools and gyms to free, at-home workouts.



If you are exercising outside, make sure to wear several layers to keep warm, including a hat and gloves. You should stay inside if the weather is treacherous. Be particularly careful of the odd patch of ice, you don't need a slip!



Find ways to keep motivated. It can be difficult to build an exercising habit so try to find ways to keep motivated. Exercising with others can make it more fun, keeping track of your exercises can show how you are improving over time, and trying new ways to exercise can help prevent boredom.



Get plenty of sleep and rest. If you are exhausted it can be hard to find the motivation to get up and active, especially if it's cold outside. Get tips on improving sleep on [page 9](#).



Make sure to warm up 10 minutes before exercising to reduce the risk of muscle strain.



**Exercising regularly can boost your mood, give you energy and stave off serious illness.**

**People that exercise regularly have a lower risk of developing many long term health conditions like heart disease, diabetes and stroke.**







# Preventing falls and improving your strength and balance

## Staying active

Improving your strength and balance through gentle exercise will improve confidence and help to prevent falls.

Active Essex have resources to help you improve your strength

and balance whilst at home. This includes tips to help build on your daily wellbeing and alternative ways to incorporate activity into your daily life. Visit their website for more information: [activeessex.org](http://activeessex.org)



## Eating well and staying hydrated

Eating well and staying hydrated are important. If you are unable to stick to a regular eating routine, it is still important that you eat snacks throughout the day to boost your energy. It is also important to ensure you are drinking at least six to eight

glasses of fluid a day to decrease the chance of feeling lightheaded and potentially increasing your risk of a fall.

You can get tips on keeping a healthy weight on the NHS website, or from your GP.



## Making your home 'fall proof'

Many slips and falls happen around the home because of simple, everyday household item. Some things you can do include:

- Removing trip hazards and clutter like wires, shoes, and rugs. Make sure to remove any rugs or mats at the top of the stairs in particular.
- Keep walkways like room entrances or hallways clear of furniture and clutter.

- Installing an LED night light by your bed or on your stairs. These help with visibility if you get up in the middle of the night. Some are also motion activated lights that switch when needed.
- Avoid buying glass furniture as this can sometimes be harder to spot around your house.



**Speaking to a healthcare professional: If you're older or vulnerable to injury, remember to discuss any falls you have had with a healthcare professional and say if it is having any impact on your health and wellbeing! You can ask for a Falls assessment. The NHS is here to help you.**



## Ensure you have sensible slippers

Did you know that unsuitable and old slippers can contribute to falls in older people? By simply changing your slippers and selecting the appropriate style, you can reduce your risk of falling and therefore receiving injuries.

Make sure that your slippers fit you properly and don't easily fall off. The bottom of the slippers should resist slips by having grooves or grippers. You may also need extra support around your ankles.

## Manage your medication

Some medicines can have possible side effects that may make you feel dizzy or light-headed. If you are experiencing these symptoms, it is important that you speak to your doctor. Ask your pharmacist for a medication review if you are taking more than 3 medications regularly.

## Checking eyesight and hearing

As you get older, you may find that your hearing is not as good as it used to be – this can sometimes have an impact on your balance, which can contribute to falls. If you notice any issues with your hearing, speak to your doctor as most of the time these issues are easily treated.

Have regular eye checks at your optician. Opticians do home visits, so if you can't leave your house, you can still get a check up,

## Six steps to prevent falls

1. Stay active
2. Manage your medication
3. Check ups for eyesight and hearing
4. Keep your home safe and well lit at night
5. Eat well and stay hydrated
6. Speak to a healthcare professional





# Keeping well in winter if you have a long-term respiratory condition

If you have a respiratory condition like COPD or asthma your symptoms may get worse when it's cold outside. Here we set out some tips to help you manage your condition and stay well.

## Staying warm

Breathing in cold air can make you feel more breathless. If able to, try to breathe through your nose rather than your mouth as this will warm the air before it reaches your airways.

We would recommend that the rooms you use in the daytime are 21 degrees with your bedroom being 18 degrees. It is also a good idea to wear warm nightclothes and to keep windows closed during very cold weather.

Wearing layers of clothing will keep you warmer than one layer by trapping air between the layers. Think about whether thermal layers may be helpful and keep blankets to hand should you feel cold indoors.

Try to drink hot drinks and eat hot meals throughout the day.

If you go outdoors, ensure you are wearing enough layers. Check the weather forecast to ensure you aren't heading out in the coldest part of the day and that you don't get caught in a downpour unexpectedly.



Wearing a scarf loosely in front of your mouth and nose can help warm the air before you breathe. This can help avoid breathlessness.



When outdoors, make sure you take your rescue medication with you in case you need it whilst out and about.



activities online such as on the NHS and Asthma and Lung UK websites.

Try to keep your energy up by eating well over winter. Aim to eat your five a day of fruit and vegetables. Keep well-stocked with food in case cold weather stops you going out for shopping.

## Keeping well and active

Keeping active not only keeps you warm by generating body heat but also helps you maintain your strength and muscle mass. If it is too cold to exercise outdoors try to do exercise indoors.

Get more advice on keeping active on [page 10](#), or you can find indoor



# Protecting yourself from viruses

## Managing your medication

Ensure you have a two-week supply of your regular medications available at home. That way you are prepared if the weather is bad, or if your pharmacy is closed because of bank holidays.

Try registering for online GP services and use the NHS App to order repeat prescriptions online.

If you are unsure if you are using your inhaler correctly, your local pharmacist can give you advice.

## Managing flare ups

Many flare ups can be managed at home with the appropriate treatment.

If you don't already have a self-management plan, speak to your GP, pharmacist or respiratory team about arranging one. These can help you manage flare ups when they occur.

If you have a rescue pack to help manage your condition, make sure you let your GP or community COPD team know if you needed to start the medication. You should let them know within two days of starting so they can advise you on your treatment.



If you are offered a vaccine, it is because you are at a greater risk of serious illness. Find out more about common winter vaccines offered to those most at risk on [page 4](#).



Try and avoid other people who are suffering with coughs and colds.



If you live someone that is ill, they can reduce the chances of passing it on if they cover their mouth or nose whenever coughing or sneezing and wash their hands regularly for 20 seconds.



Make sure you have a fully stocked medicines cabinet ([see page 6](#)) to ease symptoms if you do become ill.



If you do become ill, check out [page 3](#) for advice on how and when to seek help from the NHS.



# Support for people struggling with the cost of living

We know that many people are worried about the rising cost of essential items like food, energy, and rent. There is support available from the UK Government, local councils and charitable organisations.

You can find some of the support available to people living in Essex on our website: [EssexDoYourBit.nhs.uk](https://www.essexdoyourbit.nhs.uk)

On our website you will find information on:

- Household bills
- Childcare
- Housing and transport
- Debt
- Reducing living costs
- Food and food banks

For further advice on support available near you, talk to your local Citizens Advice. You can find your local Citizens' Advice on their website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

## Voluntary and community opportunities

If you feel fit and healthy enough to help out others during the winter months, there are a few ways you can get involved.

### Volunteer opportunities

Your local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) can also advise you what services you can volunteer with in your community.

You can find a CVS in both Thurrock (Thurrock CVS) and Southend (known as SAVS). Essex County Council has several CVS groups across their area. Check the Essex Council website to find the closest one to you.

### Volunteer at your hospital

Across mid and south Essex, you could make a massive difference by volunteering at one of our hospitals during times when they get particularly busy.

You could be a 'befriender', assisting as a mealtime companion, a catering runner or a ward runner. You could be assisting with administration. Whatever you choose, you could be doing your bit and giving something back.

You can find more about volunteering and sign up on our website: [EssexDoYourBit.nhs.uk](https://www.essexdoyourbit.nhs.uk)