

Coping With the Cold

As we approach winter in Melbourne (May--August) and also, as we approach exams, whether you are a new student or not, the following points may help you to cope with the cold.

Climate

Temperatures can vary depending on where you live, but during the winter months, can range from a day-time temperature of 13-16 degrees to a night-time temperature below 10 and sometimes, well below!

It does not generally snow in Melbourne, but may snow in the outer suburbs, rural areas and, of course, the mountains. Although we have had little rain over the past 10 years or so, a combination of low temperatures, rain and wind can make Melbourne feel quite cold.

Clothing and accessories

It is important to dress appropriately, especially if you are going to be out all day and/ or at night. Wearing layers can be useful, particularly for 'warmer' days and/ or if you are visiting venues that have heating, e.g. shopping centre or movie theatre. Even if you feel hot and/ or perspire in a heated place, remember to put on your jacket when you go outside. Perspiration dries and can make you feel cold as well as contributing to colds and influenza.

You do need a selection of jumpers, warm pants and/ or tights, a jacket or two, preferably wool and/ or made out of a fabric that dries quickly, as well as hats, scarves and closed shoes. 70% of body heat is lost through the head so remember to keep your head warm. Also, wearing open shoes including sandals is another good way of feeling and catching cold! Keep your head, hands, arms, feet and legs particularly covered.

Always have a couple of umbrellas handy in case of loss or damage. Cheaper umbrellas tend to break easily especially in the wind. You can compromise by buying one 'good' umbrella and one cheaper one for every day use. If you do get wet, if possible, remove your clothes immediately and get into dry clothes.

You may also need a change of clothing more often as laundry takes longer to dry, especially if you do not have a clothes dryer. However, putting your clothes in the shower after you have had a hot shower can help dry clothing quicker as long as the shower is dry and/ or you can place them in a room that is heated, BUT NEVER leave clothes anywhere near a heater as they can catch fire very easily!

Eating, sleeping and exercise

You may find that you need to eat more 'hearty' foods. Examples include soups rather than salads. Food gives energy which can also help keep people warm – within reason. Adapt your diet to suit the climate as well as other factors.

Many animals hibernate in the winter months. Whilst humans are not such a species, you may find that you need more sleep as it gets darker and colder. This is quite natural – within reason. However, if you are finding that you need a great deal of extra sleep, a visit to your doctor might be helpful!

Although it may be very tempting to stay indoors, a little gentle and, if possible, regular exercise can help keep you warm as well keeping you fit, mentally as well as physically.

Heating

Naturally, you will wish to be in a warm environment. You can reduce heat loss by making sure doors and windows are closed properly and using draught prevention methods, available from many hardware stores and Bunnings. Many of these are not very expensive. However, it is important to let in some fresh air, even briefly, but as regularly as possible.

There are many different types of heaters, some of which are relatively inexpensive. Of course, this also depends on your needs as well as your finances. Some of the convection heaters are useful because they switch off automatically when the room is a certain temperature. Avoid overheating your home as this can make you feel very drowsy and even dehydrated. Switch off appliances including heaters when you leave home. Read safety instructions carefully and repair or even replace electrical appliances, including heaters, which do not work.

Health

Colds are very common and fortunately, although unpleasant, are usually neither life-threatening nor long-lasting. Colds are very easily spread through contact with others. You can reduce the chances of getting a cold – or spreading it to others, and (possibly), getting it back – by using tissues and disposing of them immediately after use. Also, wash your hand thoroughly and frequently. Avoid contact with people who have colds.

Although colds cannot be prevented, it is possible to avoid influenza by being vaccinated so you may wish to consider this option. Although some of the symptoms of cold and influenza are similar, influenza is potentially more serious and long-lasting. Some of the symptoms include sneezing, coughing, runny nose and feeling tired. However, influenza sufferers often suffer from a high fever and/ or body aches and pains. If you are not sure whether you have a cold or the flu influenza, check with your doctor.

Keep healthy by reducing the use of stimulants, eating a healthy diet, getting some exercise, plenty of sleep and taking any other preventative measures. Also, if you do get sick, your chances of recovering more quickly tend to increase.

Medicine cabinet

It may be a good idea to stock up some medicinal supplies for winter. These include aspirin, cough syrup and/ or nasal sprays. Aspirin is available from supermarkets, but other products can only be purchased from chemists. It is a good idea to be guided by the advice of your doctor and/ or the chemist. Read instructions carefully and do NOT exceed the dosage prescribed. ALL medications have potential side effects so you do need to be careful and read any notes on and/ or in notes inside packets and bottles. If you feel unwell after taking any medication, stop taking it and see your doctor immediately.

Allergies and medications

Cold weather can also aggravate allergic conditions, for example, asthma and/ or hay fever. If you take medication, make sure you have enough in stock and if not, get your prescription/s filled. Again, read and follow instructions. Also, be careful that you do not exceed the required dose and be aware that some medications interact with each other.

- *Many medications, prescribed or otherwise, are affected by alcohol, even in small quantities. Some medications themselves can cause drowsiness. Do NOT mix alcohol or any other drug/s with medications!*

Having 'fun' in winter

Winter is a good time for indoor activities including reading, watching television/ DVDs, but also playing games with friends. Many restaurants/ cafes have special menus and are heated. The same applies to large shopping malls and even some of the smaller shops. Winter is also a good time to go and see museums, galleries and exhibitions. If you are really adventurous, you can also take a day or weekend tour to the snow! Of course, winter is also an excellent time to study, but you know that!

Whatever you decide to do and however you spend your time, please take care and enjoy your winter!