COLD WEATHER PROTECTION

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

During the cold winter months, COPD symptoms may worsen. But there are ways you can prevent the cold air from taking your breath away.

• **Do not smoke.** Tobacco use remains the single largest preventable cause of disease and premature death in the US; yet more than 45 million Americans still smoke cigarettes.

  Cigarette smoke contains thousands of toxic chemicals that irritate your airways and can lead to breathlessness.

• **Avoid wood burning stoves or fireplaces.** People with COPD or any lung problems are more at risk than healthy people for smoke-related health problems. Harmful toxins from wood burning stoves or fireplaces can irritate delicate airways and cause both short, and long-term health problems. To stay warm, try an energy-efficient electric heater instead.

• **Exercise indoors.** People with COPD are strongly encouraged to exercise, but when cold weather makes it uncomfortable or even impossible, try exercising indoors. If you must exercise outdoors, be sure to warm up indoors first, for at least 15 to 20 minutes. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise program.

• **Wear protective gear and breathe through your nose.** Cold air can dry out and irritate your airways, which can increase breathlessness. Try wearing a scarf over your nose and mouth or a cold weather mask. Breathing through your nose instead of your mouth warms and humidifies the inhaled air before it gets to the airways. This helps prevent shortness of breath.

  • **Use your rescue inhaler.** Always carry a rescue inhaler with you wherever you go. To make breathing easier, use the inhaler before going outdoors in cold weather, especially before walking or exercising. This will help open and relax your airways.

Reference: About.com COPD.
DON’T LET THE COLD WEATHER WORSEN CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE (CAD)

It’s important to know how cold weather can affect your heart, especially if you have CAD. People with heart disease should avoid sudden physical activity when the weather is cold, like lifting a heavy shovel full of snow. Even walking through heavy, wet snow or snowdrifts can cause strain to your heart.

Remember that, as you get older, your ability to maintain a normal internal body temperature often decreases. Elderly people seem to be especially sensitive to moderately cold conditions; they can suffer hypothermia without knowing they’re in danger. Hypothermia happens when the body temperature falls below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. It occurs when your body can’t produce enough energy to keep the internal body temperature warm enough. Please take hypothermia seriously. It can kill you. Symptoms include lack of coordination, mental confusion, slowed reactions, shivering and sleepiness.

To avoid hypothermia, keep warm:
• Wear layers of clothing. This traps air between layers, forming a protective insulation.

CONTROL YOUR ASTHMA AND BREATHE EASIER

Winter can be a stressful time of year for people with asthma because even a simple cold virus can trigger a major asthma attack. If you have asthma your lungs are already irritated, so exposure to cold and any virus that affects the lungs can bring on an asthma attack even faster than many people realize.

While you may not be able to completely avoid the cold, there are ways to stay safe and healthy. Among the most important:

• Take control of your asthma symptoms before other problems occur.
  Make sure you are taking your controller medicine. The winter season is the time of year when it’s most important to take your medicine. The new National Heart Lung Blood Institute report recommends the use of your maintenance medicine, such as a daily inhaled corticosteroid, to prevent problems during cold and flu season.

• Create and stick to your asthma action plan. This is a plan that can help you manage your symptoms before a problem occurs.
  Your asthma action plan should include a list of:
  • Asthma triggers you need to avoid.
KNOW THE SIGNS OF HEART FAILURE

Most common signs and symptoms of heart failure are:

• **Shortness of breath** that may come on suddenly. It occurs most commonly during physical activity, though it can also happen at rest, or while sleeping. It may even wake you up.

• **Persistent wheezing or coughing** that may produce small amounts of blood in your mucus.

• **Buildup of excess fluid in the body** that causes swelling in the feet, ankles, legs or abdomen. Swelling can also cause weight gain or your shoes to feel tight.

• **Persistent tiredness and fatigue** that can make it difficult to perform everyday activities.

• **Lack of appetite and nausea.**

• **Confusion or impaired thinking** that can leave you forgetful or confused.

• **Increased heart rate** or heart palpitations.

Reference: American Heart Association

EAT HEALTHY TO CONTROL DIABETES

Winter is a season of holiday celebrations, football play-offs, and other occasions when family and friends get together over meals and snacks. For people with diabetes, it can be challenging to stick to a meal plan. However, you don’t have to completely sacrifice all of your favorite foods. The key is to eat a variety of healthy foods and limit the portion sizes of treats on special occasions.

Follow these tips to help you enjoy winter season gatherings, while staying healthy:

- **Eat a healthy snack.** Eating a healthy snack prior to leaving home can prevent overeating later.
- **Plan ahead.** Check out the party food options before you begin eating, and make a note of what and how much you will eat. Your food choices should fit into your meal plan.
- **Bring a dish.** Share your healthy dish with family and friends.

Reference: National Diabetes Education Program

CONTROL YOUR ASThma AND BREATHE EASIER

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• Symptoms you need to be on the lookout for such as coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath.

• Your regular medicines, the symptoms they control and, most important, what to do and what to take in the event of an asthma attack.

You should always have on hand one or more fast-acting medicines you can take for instant relief. Make a habit of using your peak flow meter. This is a device designed to monitor how well you are controlling your asthma.

Reference: WebMD
STOP SMOKING FOR FREE!

EmblemHealth offers a free quit-smoking program as part of your plan benefits. These confidential programs provide smoking cessation services for members 18 years and older who want to stop smoking or using other forms of tobacco.

Double your chances of quitting — join our program today! Through our program, you will:

• Be able to talk to a trained smoking cessation counselor.
• Receive materials that help you prepare for your quit day, and beyond.
• Learn about other quit-smoking programs in your community.
• Get information about getting smoking cessation medicines even if they are not covered under your benefit plan.

To join a program, call New York State Quitline at 1-866-611-QUITS (1-866-611-7848). TTY users should call 711. You may also visit www.nysmokefree.com.

DON’T LET THE COLD WEATHER WORSEN YOUR CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE (CAD)

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• Wear a hat or headscarf. Heat can easily be lost through your head and ears are especially prone to frostbite.

• Keep your hands and feet warm, too. They tend to lose heat rapidly.

• Don’t drink alcoholic beverages before going outdoors or when outside. Alcohol gives an initial feeling of warmth, because blood vessels in the skin expand. Heat is then drawn away from the body’s vital organs.

Reference: American Heart Association