



Winter and Chronic Conditions
1



Tips for Staying Active
2



Highlights
2



DDS SafetyNet

PROMOTING CHOICE AND OPTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Winter and Chronic Conditions

We often think of colds and coughs when winter comes along. But what about “chronic conditions”? These are conditions people have all the time throughout much of their lives. While chronic conditions can't be cured, managing them properly can have a positive impact on a person's quality of life. This is especially true during the cold winter months.

Three common chronic conditions are **asthma**, **arthritis**, and **diabetes**. During the winter it is important to pay special attention to the people you support who have these conditions. Winter weather may change the way these conditions make them feel and the type of support they need. The more you know, the more you can help!

Asthma

Asthma is a chronic disease that causes the airways in the lungs to become inflamed and narrow, making it difficult to breathe. Cold air also causes these airways to narrow, which can make it even more difficult for people with asthma to breathe. Winter is also the season of colds and flu and for spending more time indoors. Catching a cold or the flu can make asthma symptoms more severe, and spending more time indoors exposes the people you support who have asthma to dust and indoor allergens that can trigger an asthma attack.

Arthritis

Arthritis is a chronic disease that causes pain, stiffness and swelling in the joints, all of which can make it difficult to move. While there is little scientific evidence that cold weather worsens arthritis, many people report that their arthritis feels worse in the winter. Additionally, we all tend to be less active in the winter. Moving less causes the joints of those with arthritis to become even stiffer. Finally, colds and flu can make arthritis pain feel worse.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic condition that, left untreated, allows a high level of sugar to build up in a person's blood, which can damage other parts of the body. Cold weather can cause a change in a person's blood sugar. Winter weather conditions can make all of us less active, but it is especially important for people with diabetes to continue to exercise. Like other chronic conditions, colds and flu can make diabetes more difficult to manage.

How to help!

Even though asthma, arthritis and diabetes are very different conditions, there are common strategies you can use to help the people you support protect themselves from the effects of winter. You can find out about these strategies on the next page.

How Winter Physically Affects People with Asthma, Arthritis, and Diabetes

Asthma	Arthritis	Diabetes
Cold and dry air can bring on asthma symptoms.	Many people report that cold and damp weather makes their joints ache.	Cold weather can make people's blood sugar levels change quickly.
Bugs that can cause an asthma attack – like dust mites – like to live in warm, heated homes.	People are often less active because of cold weather – this can mean joints become more stiff and painful to move.	Being less active because of cold weather can affect how people need to regulate their blood sugar levels.
Colds and flu can make people's asthma symptoms worse.	Colds and flu can make people feel achy, adding to the achy pain of their arthritis.	Colds and flu can affect people's blood sugar levels.

Tips for Staying Active, Warm & Healthy

The following strategies can help protect people who have asthma, arthritis or diabetes:

- **Staying active** (this will also help people who feel more anxious and depressed during the winter)
- **Staying warm** (especially when outside), and
- **Staying healthy** by avoiding getting colds or the flu

Staying Active

Staying active during the winter is difficult because cold and damp weather sometimes makes people want to stay inside. Try to make sure that the people you support can remain energetic during these cold months. This might mean finding some new ways to get exercise without being outside, like:

- Walking in shopping malls.
- Using the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Doing simple stretches while watching TV.
- Taking yoga or other classes at a local recreation center.
- Doing household chores, like vacuuming.

Staying Warm

Even though the weather is colder during the winter, it is important for everyone to get plenty of fresh air. Help the people you support enjoy being outside by helping them wear the right type of clothing, such as hats, gloves, thick socks and waterproof boots if necessary. Here is a way to remind the people you support how to dress during the winter: "C.O.L.D."

- **C = Cover:** Support people to cover parts of their body that get cold easily, like their head and hands.
- **O = Overwork:** Remind people not to overwork their bodies while outside, as sweating can make them feel colder.
- **L = Layers:** Help people dress with plenty of layers.
- **D = Dry:** Be sure people wear appropriate shoes and change their clothes quickly if they get wet.

Staying Healthy: Avoiding colds and the flu

Although everyone seems to get a cold or flu during this time of year, there are ways to avoid getting sick. For example:

- Remind people to wash their hands frequently – this helps to stop the spread of germs.
- Encourage everyone to get a flu shot – the flu shot helps prevent people from catching the flu.
- Remind the people you support about their regular medications and medical check-ups.

Extra! Extra! Here are a few more specific tips:

- Help people with **arthritis** do simple tasks that they might find more painful, like lifting heavy objects or reaching to high shelves.
- Make sure to offer people with **diabetes** healthy alternatives to sweet holiday treats made with lots of sugar.
- Remind people with **asthma** to keep their inhalers warm outside by putting them in a sock.

By paying special attention to the effects of winter, you can help everyone to stay happy and healthy!

FYI Resource Links for Better Living

For more information on dealing with asthma, arthritis and diabetes during the winter, you can visit the following websites.

Information on arthritis:

<http://www.arthritis.org>

Information on asthma and allergies:

<http://www.aafa.org>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/asthma/DS00021>

Information on diabetes:

<http://www.dlife.com>

<http://www.diabetes.org/about-diabetes.jsp>

Remember to look at the DDS SafetyNet website for more information on these conditions:
www.ddsafety.net

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www.ddssafety.net/Subscribe.aspx

Check out

www.ddssafety.net

for more information that can help individuals with developmental disabilities live healthier and happier lives!

The site is translated into Spanish and Tagalog!

Just log on and tell us what you think!