

# Avoid *colds* and *flu* this winter

ADVICE FROM THE COLLEGE OF NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE



Georgie O'Connor, lecturer and nutritional therapist.

**W**inter is the prime time for respiratory problems such as colds and flu, not least because we spend more time indoors with other people where viruses can spread quickly. So what can we do to protect ourselves? Here are some practical tips to help avoid succumbing to the usual winter bugs, by Georgie O'Connor, a lecturer for The College of Naturopathic Medicine in Bristol and a practising naturopathic nutritional therapist in Plymouth.

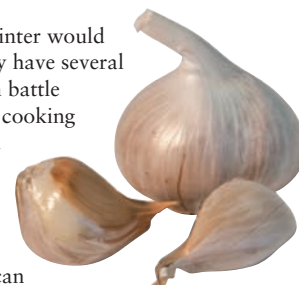
The first step is good nutrition. When our bodies use oxygen to perform normal bodily functions, free radicals are produced which can be very damaging to the body if left unchecked.

Fortunately, a good diet contains antioxidants, a class of nutrients that can prevent and repair such damage. In times of greater stress such as keeping warm, staying dry and battling with bugs, the rate of free radical production can go up, so we have to give the body extra help for the mopping-up operation. When people talk about antioxidants we usually picture brightly coloured summer fruit and vegetables which aren't in season in the winter months. Plus we tend to hanker after 'comfort-food' in winter. Never fear, we can get antioxidants from seasonal products that can be part of a great comforting experience! Here are just a few examples:

- Root vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes are great sources of carotenoids and vitamin A; have them steamed or baked with a sprinkle of olive oil, lemon juice and herbs.
- A handful of almonds can provide almost half of your daily recommended amount of vitamin E which is vitally important for good skin health as well as the immune system through the winter months. Eat them as a snack or lightly crush them and sprinkle on soups or stews for added texture.



- Button mushrooms contain selenium, and B vitamins riboflavin and niacin, which are all known to play a role in a healthy immune system, so try some lightly sautéed on rye toast for breakfast.
- A really powerful antioxidant known to help strengthen the immune system in its battle against infections is Glutathione. It can be found in lots of foods but cabbage is an excellent seasonal and inexpensive source; so add cabbage to your soups and stews.
- No advice about the immune system in winter would be complete without onions & garlic; they have several antioxidants that help the immune system battle against the seasonal viral invaders. When cooking with garlic or onions, peel, chop and then leave for 10-15 minutes to allow activation of the immune boosting properties.
- And although not in season, frozen fruit can be a brilliant source of antioxidants. Try them heated gently over porridge or with oats & yoghurt.



Secondly, stay hydrated; with heating systems in homes and offices it's just as important to do so in winter months. If cold drinks like water and diluted fruit juice don't appeal then try hot water with any of the following: lemon, ginger, honey, cinnamon or fresh herbs such as mint. Herbal teas such as rooibos (red bush), or fruit teas are widely available and very comforting.

Thirdly, good hygiene is extremely important. Viruses that cause colds & flu can live for up to 3 hours on your skin or hard surfaces. So keep your hands scrupulously clean and sneeze or cough into a disposable tissue.

And lastly but by no means least, there is an advantage to shorter days and colder evenings – it's the perfect excuse for getting under the covers! While you rest, your body can direct more energy to fighting off germs.

If you'd like to find out more about training for a new career as a Nutritional Therapist, come along to CNM Bristol's next free-to-attend Open Evening on Tuesday 29th November 6.30pm-8.30pm. To book your place call 01342 410 505.