



Wellness News

December 2025

This issue

Winter Wellness: 7 Tips For Staying Healthy During The Holidays

Cold, Flu, COVID-19: What Are The Differences?

Understanding The Signs And Effects Of Substance Use

9 Tips To Fend Off Holiday Stress

Recipe: Spice-Rubbed Chicken Lettuce Cups



Anthem Members:

You can view and manage your benefits, access wellness tools and resources to improve your overall wellbeing from the [Sydney Health app](#).



Simply scan the **QR code** with your smartphone's camera to download the app today.

"Who you are tomorrow begins with what you do today." - Tom Fargo

Winter wellness: 7 tips for staying healthy during the holidays

The holidays are a wonderful time for family, friends and celebrations. But winter can take a toll on your physical and mental health, even during the festivities.

So what can you do to stay healthy this winter?

Drink water.

Winter may be a good time for hot cocoa and cider, but always [make water your drink of choice](#). While hot beverages can be great for warmth, remember to keep it balanced with at least 8 cups of water per day. A glass of water with and between each meal can keep you hydrated, healthy and ready to fight off any germs winter may bring.

Stress less.

Over-the-top holiday excursions [can be stressful](#), which isn't how you should feel in this joyful season. Focus on your holiday traditions — don't worry about the rest. Make time for friends, family and good cheer, and embrace relaxation when you can.

Sleep enough.

Don't neglect the value of sleep. Do all that you can to stick to your typical sleep schedule, even around all the celebrations and traveling. Avoid or limit caffeine, alcohol, daytime napping and large meals before bed. These factors can interfere with a [good night's rest](#).

Dress warmly.

Remember headwear that fully covers your ears, wear mittens rather than gloves and pull on well-insulated socks when dressing for the weather. Instead of wearing one big coat, dress in several layers of loose, warm clothing. This will better protect you against wind, snow and rain. If your clothes become wet, change them as soon as possible.

Limit time in the cold.

Pay attention to weather forecasts and windchill readings. Dress accordingly, but also watch for signs of frostbite, such as red or pale skin, prickling and numbness. Seek emergency help right away if you experience any signs of [hypothermia](#), including intense shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination or fatigue. You can avoid these [cold-weather hazards](#) if you take measures to protect yourself against the cold, such as packing an emergency supply kit and warm clothing while traveling.



Exercise.

Cold air sometimes can discourage you from keeping up with your fitness routines. It's easy to let these habits slide for the season, but remember that regular activity can keep you healthy, both mentally and physically. Choose an indoor exercise if the temperature is below zero or the windchill is extreme. Workout apps or online exercise programs are great tools to get you moving in the comfort of your home. If you prefer to [exercise outside](#), dress appropriately. Too many layers can make you overheat, so choose layers you can easily remove.

Keep the germs away.

Three words: [Wash your hands](#). This is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading common winter illnesses, such as colds. Germs accumulate through nearly everything you do or touch, so wash your hands frequently. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds, scrubbing all surfaces and rinsing well. Also, get [flu](#) and [COVID-19 vaccines](#) to [avoid being sick](#) during the coldest time of year.

Following these tips can ensure you have a safe, happy and healthy holiday season.



Cold, Flu, COVID-19: what are the differences?

Influenza (flu) and the common cold are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. Flu is caused by influenza viruses only, whereas the common cold can be caused by a number of different viruses, including rhinoviruses, parainfluenza, and seasonal coronaviruses. Seasonal coronaviruses should not be confused with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes [COVID-19](#). Because flu and the common cold have similar symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Please see the full articles footnoted below, for more information.

How can you lower your risk of COVID-19, a cold and the flu?

If you are at a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19 or the flu, talk to your healthcare professional about how best to protect yourself. Know what to do if you get sick so you can quickly start treatment.

You can lower your risk of infection with viruses that cause COVID-19, the flu, or colds by following some standard safety measures.

Get vaccinated Get a yearly flu vaccine and stay up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine can lower the risk of death or serious illness caused by COVID-19.

Getting a yearly flu vaccine lowers your risk of the flu. It can be given as a shot or as a nasal spray. The flu vaccine also lowers the chance you'll have a serious case of flu. It also lowers the risk of serious complications.

Wash your hands often and follow good hand hygiene Use soap and water and scrub for at least 20 seconds. Or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Wash your hands well and often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Make sure friends and family that you're around regularly, especially kids, know the importance of hand-washing.

Cover your mouth and nose with the inside of your elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw away the used tissue. Wash your hands right away. Try not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Regularly clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces Regularly clean often-touched surfaces to prevent spread of infection from touching a surface with the virus on it and then your face. Examples of high-touch surfaces include doorknobs, light switches, electronics, and counters.

Be cautious in indoor public spaces Try to keep distance between yourself and others when you're in these spaces. This is especially important if you have a higher risk of serious illness. Some people with COVID-19 can spread the COVID-19 virus to others even if they don't have symptoms. They might not know that they have COVID-19.

Limit contact during illness Stay away from anyone who is sick. Try not to have close contact with anyone who seems ill or has symptoms.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, test for the infection. Or test five days after you came in contact with the virus.

If you're sick, stay home and away from others, including pets, if possible. Don't use public transportation, taxis, and ride-hailing services if you're sick. Don't share dishes, glasses, towels, bedding, and other household items if you're sick.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/covid-19-cold-flu-and-allergies-differences/art-20503981> <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/coldflu.html>

¹ Costs are ranked according to the member's estimated out-of-pocket costs and average health plan copays. \$ = lower cost and \$\$\$ = higher cost. Care outside of your plan may cost more out of pocket. Call the Member Services number on your ID card if you have questions about your plan. Prescription availability is defined by physician judgment.



At-A-Glance

Signs and Symptoms	Cold	Flu	COVID-19
Symptom onset	1-3 days after exposure	Abrupt 1-4 days after exposure	2-14 days after exposure
Fever	Rarely	Usual	Sometimes
Aches	Slight	Usual	Sometimes
Tiredness Fatigue	Never	Usually	Usually
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes	Sometimes
Cough	Mild to moderate	Common	Sometimes (dry)
Stuffy or stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes	Usually
Sore throat	Common	Usually	Usually
Headache	Rarely	Common	Usually
Muscle aches	Never		Sometimes
Nausea or vomiting	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes (more common in children)
Diarrhea	Usually	Sometimes	Sometimes (more common in children)
Shortness of breath or trouble breathing	Never	Sometimes	Sometimes
New loss of taste or smell	Never	Rarely	Sometimes (early often without runny nose or stuffy nose)

Find the right place to go when you need to see a doctor quickly — The ER isn't your only option

Your primary care doctor is usually the best place to start when you need care. After all, they know your story. But you have other options for non-emergency care —even in the middle of the night. Make a plan now, so you're prepared when you need to choose care in a hurry. **And remember, going to the emergency room (ER) or calling 9-1-1 is always best when it's an emergency.**

Where to go	What can be treated	Hours	Your cost ¹
Have a video visit with a doctor on LiveHealth Online.	Flu and cold symptoms, allergies, pink eye and sinus infections, even if a prescription is needed ² Sydney Health app, Select CARE at the bottom navigation bar, then select Virtual Care . Not an Anthem member? Go to www.Livehealhtonline.com	24/7 from your smartphone, tablet or computer with webcam	\$
Call your doctor's office	Flu and cold symptoms, allergies, chronic health conditions and preventive care like your annual physical	Hours vary, usually best by appointment	\$\$
Visit a retail health clinic	Flu and cold symptoms, rashes, minor allergic reactions, pink eye, urinary tract infections and minor cuts and burns	Most can see you nights and weekends, and accept walk-ins	\$\$
Go to an urgent care center	Back and joint injuries, flu and cold symptoms, sprains, strains and cuts or when you need X-rays	Usually open extended hours (nights and weekends)	\$\$\$
Emergency Room	Coughing up or vomiting blood, Symptoms fee life-threatening or disabling, Chest pain or sever shortness of breath, pregnant and having labor pain etc.	24/7	\$\$\$\$

Understanding the signs and effects of substance use

Substance use and substance use disorder affect nearly [50 million people](#) in the United States.¹ And it's safe to assume that just as many are indirectly affected as family members or friends of someone who struggles with substances. Substance use disorder is a mental health condition that can range in severity but ultimately involves the problematic use of substances to some degree.

This can include alcohol, marijuana, prescription opioids, heroin, inhalants, cocaine, and methamphetamine. The use of these substances can increase the risk of harmful behavior, cause long-term health issues, and lead to damaged lives and relationships.

Signs of alcohol use

The following signs and symptoms may be a signal that someone needs help. Even [one of these symptoms is cause for concern](#) but the more that apply, the more urgently help may be needed.² You or someone you care about may need help if you or they:

- End up drinking more, or longer, than intended.
- Wanted to cut down or stop drinking in the past but couldn't.
- Spend a lot of time drinking, being sick from drinking, or getting over other after-effects.
- Have wanted a drink so badly it was hard to think of anything else.
- Find that drinking — or being sick from drinking — often interferes with relationships, work, or school.
- Have given up or cut back on activities you found important or enjoyable in order to drink.
- Got into situations while or after drinking that increased the chance of getting hurt, such as driving or unsafe sexual behavior.
- Continue to drink even though it causes anxiety or depression or adds to another health problem.
- Have to drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want.
- Notice withdrawal symptoms when the effects of drinking wear off, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, or a racing heart.

Signs of drug use

There are certain [signs to watch for if you're wondering if you or someone close to you is struggling with drug use](#), including:³

- Feeling the need to use the drug regularly.
- Needing more of the drug over time to get the same effect.
- Maintaining a supply of the drug.
- Spending money on the drug, even though you can't afford it.
- Continuing to use the drug when you know it's causing problems in your life.
- Doing things to get the drug that you normally wouldn't.
- Failing in any attempts to stop using the drug.
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when attempting to stop taking the drug.
- Having problems at school or work or with meeting responsibilities.
- Experiencing physical health issues.
- Noticing changes in behavior.

Long-term effects of substance use

[The long-term effects of substance use](#) can depend on the specific substance a person uses, how long they've used it, and other individual factors.⁴ The good news is that many of the effects of alcohol and drug use can improve with treatment and with maintaining long-term recovery. Those who struggle with substance use may have an increased risk of:

- Memory loss or loss of nerve function
- Heart or liver failure
- Respiratory issues
- Cancer
- Gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- Kidney failure
- Seizures
- Other mental health conditions

Finding help

Substance use disorder is a condition that needs ongoing treatment. Even for those in recovery there is always a chance of relapse, so it's important to keep up with treatment in the long term. That may include behavioral approaches like talk therapy, group counseling like Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous, or medication-assisted therapy.



Anthem Members: Please utilize the **Emotional Wellbeing Resources (EWR)**, **ages 13+** and Mental Health Support through the **Virtual Care Center**.

Sydney Health app select **CARE**, then, **Virtual Care** or ACCESS CARE, My Health Dashboard, then **Featured Programs** to find the above program (EWR) and others available to you and your covered loved ones. Check out **Community Resourcess** as well.

If you have an Anthem health plan, you may have benefits that can help with the cost of treatment. Log in to the [SydneySM Health](#) app or [anthem.com](#) to review your benefit details and find treatment options in your plan's network. . . To find a doctor in your plan, visit Sydney Health, select CARE then Find Care & Cost.

You can also visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services website at [samhsa.gov](#) have an Anthem health plan, you may have benefits that can help with the cost **v/find-help** for more information on treatment options and support in your area.

9 tips to fend off holiday stress

The holidays are a time for family and cheer, but making sure the house is clean, the food is ready, and the presents are wrapped and ready to be opened can be overwhelming. These factors can bring unwanted stress and depression in a time meant for happiness.

Some important, practical tips can help minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. These tips may even help you enjoy the holidays more than expected.

Through the endless parties, cooking, shopping and cleaning, try taking one of 9 steps to ensure you have a stress-free holiday:



Plan ahead

Between co-workers, friends and family, it's inevitable that some commitments will end up on the same day. Make sure to plan on what you can attend in person or virtually. If you're hosting the holidays, create a menu to help you stay organized and make grocery shopping easier.

Say no

With holiday commitments, it is OK to say no to a few or all of them. It also will help relieve some stress. Try sharing your to-do list with other family members.

Plan spending

The holidays mean spending money. Make a budget and stick to it. Spending money on your loved ones is important, but it's also important to pay your energy bill. Don't buy gifts that you'll be paying off for the rest of the year.

Create relaxing surroundings

Turn on some music, light some candles or open the windows on a sunny day. Research has found that listening to music and the scent of citrus can boost feelings of well-being, and vitamin D is always a happiness booster.

Maintain healthy habits

The holidays are notorious for ruining healthy habits. A short workout each morning will help your decision-making throughout the day. Encourage your family to try snow shoeing or sledding to get in extra exercise. Eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit or vegetables throughout the season and to fill up before a dinner party or celebration with tempting, but unhealthy, foods.

Share feelings

Spending a holiday after a loss in the family can be difficult. Accept your feelings and open up about them to others. It may make you feel better to share. Try to switch up old traditions to ease the loss.

Respect differences

Family members will have different viewpoints than your own. Try your best to forgive and forget this holiday season. Focus on your similarities and replace tension with something productive.

Be realistic

You are only one person, and you can only do so much. Be realistic with how much you can handle this season. Forget about perfection, and relax and enjoy the company surrounding you

Take a break

Don't forget about your own needs. Take a nap, go for a short walk, read a book or watch a funny movie. Laughing relaxes the whole body and can relieve physical tension and stress.

Holidays are meant to be a fun, enjoyable time with friends and family. These tips can help ensure you truly enjoy your holidays when stress starts to set in.

Spice-Rubbed Chicken Lettuce Cups

Boring chicken, begone! Our intensely flavorful spice rub gives new life to plain ole white meat. Grill it up, then chop into bite-size pieces to pile into lettuce cups (or tacos, rice bowls, flatbreads, and anything else you can imagine!).

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 Tbsp. paprika
- 1 Tbsp. ground cumin
- 1 Tbsp. light brown sugar
- 2 tsp. dried oregano
- 2 tsp. onion powder
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 3 8-ounce boneless, skinless chicken breasts (11/2 pounds)
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 tsp. lime zest plus 1 to 2 tablespoons juice
- Lettuce leaves and cilantro leaves, for serving

Yields: 4
Total Time: 35 mins
Cal/Serv: 381
BY TINA MARTINEZ

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION (per serving): About 381 calories, 22.5 g fat (5.5 g saturated), 108 mg cholesterol, 335 mg sodium, 8 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 4.5 g sugar (3.5 g added sugar), 36 g protein

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/food-recipes/a60359215/spice-rubbed-chicken-lettuce-cups-recipe/>



Directions

Step 1 Heat grill to medium. In medium bowl, whisk together oil, paprika, cumin, brown sugar, oregano, onion powder, cayenne pepper, and 1/2 teaspoon each salt and black pepper. Add 1 chicken breast at a time and coat with spice rub.

Step 2 Grill chicken, covered, until cooked through (165°F on instant-read thermometer), 8 to 9 minutes per side. Transfer to cutting board and let rest 10 minutes before cutting into bite-size pieces.

Step 3 In small bowl, combine sour cream, lime zest, and 1 tablespoon juice, adding additional juice if desired.

Step 4 Serve chicken with lime crema and lettuce leaves and cilantro if desired.