

# AMIAN HEALTH & WELLBEING – NOVEMBER 16



## Winter Well Being

### Easy ways to boost your immunity

It may be cold outside, but winter needn't be an unhealthy time of year. Take a look at these tips to help you stay healthy, boost your immune system, and fight off flu and other germs during winter...

- **Eat more fruit and veg** - When it's cold and dark outside, it can be tempting to fill up on unhealthy comfort food, but it's important to ensure you still have a healthy diet and include 5 - 7 portions of fruit and veg a day. Eating foods that are high in vitamin C will help keep your immune system strong, so include fruit and vegetables as oranges, kiwi fruit, peppers and broccoli in your diet. Winter vegetables such as carrots, parsnips, swede and turnips can be roasted, mashed or made into soup for a comforting winter meal. Explore varieties of fruit and veg that you may not normally eat.

- **Have a hearty breakfast** - Winter is the perfect season for porridge. Eating a warm bowlful on a cold morning isn't just a delicious way to start your day, it also helps boost your intake of starchy foods and fibre. These give you energy and help you feel fuller for longer, stopping the temptation to snack mid-morning. Oats also contain lots of vital vitamins and minerals. Make your porridge with semi-skimmed or skimmed milk, unsweetened almond milk or water, and don't add sugar or salt. Add a handful of blueberries, a handful of nuts and sprinkle with cinnamon and 1 tsp of honey!
- **Exercise regularly** - It's vital to keep your fitness levels up during winter, with studies showing that a moderate level of regular exercise has a long-term cumulative effect on your immune system. A study showed that people who go for a brisk walk several times a week reduced the number of sick days they took by about 40%. Regular aerobic exercise, 5 or more days a week for more than 20 minutes a day, is the most important lifestyle factor in reducing your sick days during the cold season.
- **Stay connected** - Don't use the cold winter months as an excuse to stay in and lounge around. Instead, get out with friends and family to try out a new activity – maybe ice skating, indoor rock climbing or wrapping up and taking a winter walk. Socialising helps strengthen your immune system by keeping you active and reducing your stress levels, so avoid the temptation to stay on the sofa all winter.
- **Scrub up** - Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading illness as it limits the transfer of bacteria, viruses and other microbes. This is important during winter when we tend to cough and sneeze more frequently. Wet your hands and lather up with soap for 20 seconds to help dislodge germs and rinse well under running water.
- **Sleep well** - Lack of sleep can lead to a substantial decrease in the white blood cells that help to fight infection in your body. This can have a serious effect on your immune system, making you more vulnerable to catching colds. Use the winter months as a way to catch up on sleep and try to get 7 to 9 hours every night. Create a relaxing bedtime routine, such as listening to soft music or soaking in a warm bath. Avoid watching TV or using your computer just before bedtime. Turn the lights down low an hour before you turn in for the night, as this will boost the release of melatonin in the brain, the hormone used by your body to help you fall asleep.



## Looking after your mental health

### Tips for your wellbeing and inner strength...

Your mental health is very important. Good mental health helps you enjoy life and cope with problems and improves your wellbeing and inner strength. Just as you take care of your body by eating the right foods and exercising, you can do things to protect your mental health.

**Nutrition and mental health** - The food you eat can have a direct effect on your energy level, physical health, and mood. A "healthy diet" is one that has enough of each essential nutrient, contains many foods from all of the basic food groups, provides the right amount of calories to maintain a healthy weight, and does not have too much fat, sugar, salt, or alcohol.

**Exercise and mental health** - Regular physical activity is important to the physical and mental health of almost everyone, including older adults. Being physically active can help you continue to do the things you enjoy and stay independent as you age. Regular physical activity over long periods of time can produce long-term health benefits. That's why health experts say that everyone should be active every day to maintain their health. Exercise has been shown to help with the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Your body makes certain chemicals, called endorphins, before and after you work out. They relieve stress and improve your mood.

**Sleep and mental health** - Your mind and body will feel better if you sleep well. Your body needs time every day to rest and heal. If you often have trouble sleeping - either falling asleep, or waking during the night and being unable to get back to sleep - one or several of the following ideas might be helpful to you:

- Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. Avoid "sleeping in" (i.e. sleeping much later than your usual time for getting up). It will make you feel worse.
- Establish a bedtime "ritual" by doing the same things every night for an hour or two before bedtime so your body knows when it is time to go to sleep.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Avoid a heavy meal prior to going to bed and don't skip any meals.
- Eat plenty of dairy foods and dark green leafy vegetables.
- Exercise daily, but avoid strenuous or invigorating activity before going to bed.
- Play soothing music on a tape or CD that shuts off automatically after you are in bed.
- Have a camomile tea before bed to help relax and feely sleepy
- A small bowl of cottage cheese with 1 tsp of honey is a perfect snack before bed, this slow releasing protein will keep midnight hunger at bay!
- Take a warm bath or shower before going to bed.
- Place a drop of lavender oil on your pillow.

**Stress and mental health** - Stress can happen for many reasons - a traumatic accident, family bereavement, emergency situation or a serious illness or disease. We can also feel stressed as a result of our daily life, workplace, and family responsibilities. It's hard to stay calm and relaxed in our hectic lives. With all we have going on in our lives, it seems almost impossible to find ways to de-stress. But it's important to find those

ways. Your health depends on it. Remember to always make time for you. It's important to care for yourself. No matter how busy you are, try to set aside at least 15 minutes each day in your schedule to do something for yourself, like taking a bath, going for a walk, or phoning a friend.



## Stress and over-eating

### Do you reach for a chocolate bar when you feel stressed?

Research indicates people will often overeat or 'comfort eat' with unhealthy foods, when they feel under pressure or stress. So why does it happen?

There are 3 main reasons:

- Dealing with stress distracts us from controlling our food intake.
- Eating unhealthy 'comfort' food becomes an emotional coping mechanism.
- But there is a third reason that is emerging in current thinking - stress and appetite responses are both controlled by the same small area of the brain – the hypothalamus. It may be that stress responses confuse appetite signals and this prevents us from controlling our food intake.

During periods of stress, it's more important than ever to eat a healthy diet. This is because stress can affect your digestive system, reducing or impairing your ability to absorb vitamins and minerals. So it's therefore essential to try and plan your eating habits even more carefully during periods of stress. Don't let your diet go out of control or it will only prolong the stress, or even make it worse.

### Some good tips:

- Eat little and often to keep your blood sugar levels stable.
- Make sure you have plenty of healthy snacks available such as fruit, seeds or nuts – don't reach for the chocolate bar!
- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Don't skip meals!
- Drink plenty of water (at least 1.5 litres per day) – dehydration contributes to feelings of anxiety.
- Keep the fridge/cupboard free of sugary snacks!
- Eat slowly and sit down, allowing at least half an hour for each meal.

Of course, the best way to avoid stress affecting your eating pattern is to avoid it! Try to manage your stress and control the effect it has on you. Learn positive relaxation techniques, and exercise regularly. Be realistic about what you want to achieve. Don't take too much on.



## Alcohol Awareness

### Get the facts

There are many myths about alcohol and drinking and, although a drink now and then won't do you any harm, regularly exceeding the recommended guidelines puts both your short-term and long-term health at risk. Take a look below and find out what's myth and what's reality...

**Myth 1 - A trip to the gym will help me sweat out the alcohol** - Exercise can make you feel a bit better after drinking, but it's not possible to sweat out the alcohol. Only time will get the booze out of your bloodstream. It takes about 2 hours for the adult body to eliminate the alcohol content of a single drink, depending on your weight. Nothing can speed up this process - not even coffee or cold showers. Plus your risk of pulling a muscle when you're working out is greater if you've been drinking (even the night before) or if you're hungover.

**Myth 2 - Coffee sobers me up** - Drinking coffee makes you feel more awake, but won't make you less drunk or cure a hangover. Drinking caffeine may also make it harder for you to realise whether you're still drunk, leading to poor decision-making – like driving whilst there's still alcohol in your blood.

**Myth 3 - Alcohol is a winter warmer** - A shot of whisky or brandy can make you feel warmer for a bit, but alcohol actually lowers your body temperature, so it's not always a good idea in cold weather.

**Myth 4 - Drinking helps me sleep** - Alcohol can make you feel sleepy, and help you get to sleep quickly. But it will also stop your body getting the deep sleep you need, leaving you tired the next morning.

**Myth 5 - Alcohol gives me a boost** - Alcohol is a depressant. It slows down how you think, move and react. So it's not the best way to pick yourself up.

**Myth 6 - Drinking when pregnant is OK** - Drinking alcohol when you're pregnant can be harmful, particularly during the early stages of pregnancy. The best advice if you're pregnant, or trying to have a baby, is to avoid alcohol altogether.

**Myth 7 - I can drink and still be in control** - Alcohol dulls your brain like an anaesthetic. It clouds your judgement, making you more clumsy and slower to react, so your risk of accidents and injuries is much higher. It also increases the likelihood that you will do something you'll later regret.

**Myth 8 - I can save up my alcohol units for the weekend** - Current guidelines recommend spreading your alcohol over three days or more and to have at least two alcohol-free days in every seven. Saving your units up and drinking them all at once will leave you with a nasty hangover in the morning, as well as increasing your risk of injuries, fights and accidents.



**AMIAN** Counselling and support service provides all University of Bolton staff with unbiased, impartial, independent, free advice and support and is a practical and positive way to help resolve concerns and difficulties. Not all staff accessing our service requires counselling, some just need the assistance from someone outside of the situation to help explore possible options and provide advice, support and information.

**The service is completely confidential and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is available to all employees.**

**If you have any further questions or wish to book an appointment, please do not hesitate to contact **AMIAN**:**

**Tel: 01204 418183 / 07872 423 088**

**Email: [info@amianltd.co.uk](mailto:info@amianltd.co.uk)**

