

Your
Health



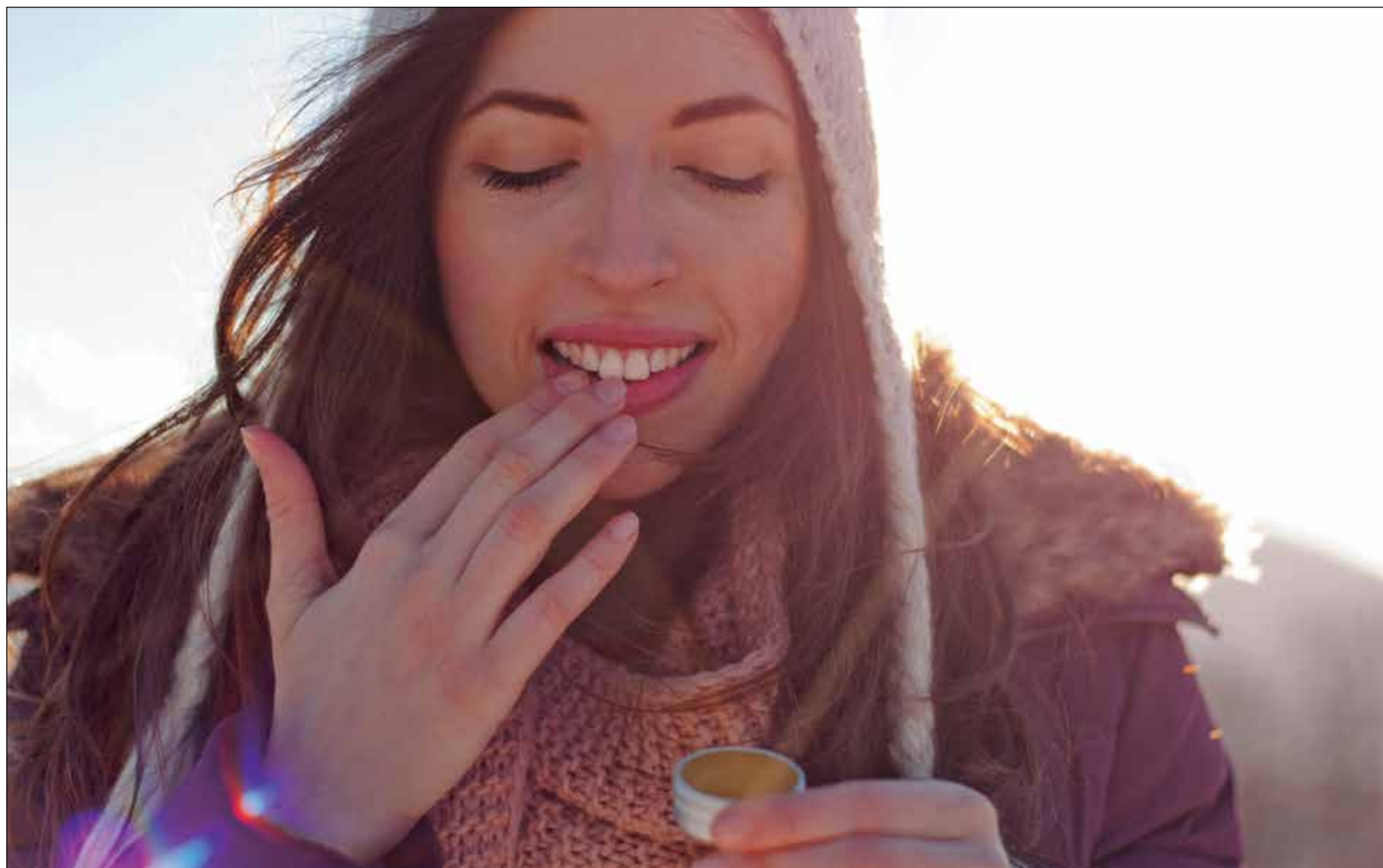
Winter Oral Care Tips

With the arrival of winter, we often focus on the many ways we can protect ourselves from exposure that can lead to viruses, colds and the flu, among other concerns. But cold weather also presents challenges for oral health.

It's important to maintain your dental health year-round to keep your teeth as white as snow and your mouth free of the conditions that arise when the temperature drops. Here are some common conditions that strike during winter and how you can protect yourself.

TEETH SENSITIVITY

If your teeth are already sensitive, cold winter weather may have an even more harmful effect. As always, make sure you brush twice a day and remember to floss. Choose a toothbrush with soft bristles and use potassium-based desensitizing toothpaste ahead of the season to get its full effects. Calcium-based desensitizing toothpaste can bring fast relief, plugging open pores and protecting the sensitive nerve endings in your teeth. Also, remember to drink plenty of water to keep teeth and gums moist, and avoid sugary or acidic drinks that can aggra-



© ADOBE STOCK

vate your teeth and cause sensitivity issues.

DRY MOUTH/ CHAPPED LIPS

During winter the air becomes not only cold but dry. And like any part of your body that's exposed, your mouth deserves extra attention to retain moisture. A case of dry mouth can not only cause discomfort, but can also lead to more serious issues such as gum disease and tooth decay. Keeping hydrated helps, but also consider a mouthwash

designed to fight dry mouth available at most drug stores. Cold weather can also bring dry, chapped lips. Again, drinking plenty of water helps but for extra protection add a lip balm with an SPF of 15 or higher that can keep lips moist and helps prevent canker and cold sores.

CANKER/COLD SORES

First some definitions. Canker sores affect the inside of your mouth and are most commonly caused by foods high in acid. Cold sores present

on the lips and edges of your mouth and can occur due to cold weather exposure. Keep these unpleasant issues at bay in winter by protecting your lips with lip balm and shielding your mouth from cold, dry air whenever possible.

MOUTH GUARDS

Enjoying outdoor sporting activities is the best part of the season for many, but they can also bring the potential for painful and expensive dental injuries. Whether your skiing or snowboarding, ice skating or

sledding, bring a properly fitted mouth guard along for your adventures to reduce your risk from these injuries.

STICK TO YOUR ROUTINE

Finally, one of the most effective ways to prevent oral health problems is by maintaining your dental care routine. Holidays and vacations can often upset and interfere with any routine, but make the extra effort to brush twice a day and floss once a day. Also, don't forget your dental care products and tools when traveling.

Coping with Asthma During Winter

Cold and flu season can be challenging for everyone. For those with asthma or other respiratory ailments, these seemingly minor illnesses can take your breath away.

According to the Mayo Clinic, even a mild cold can produce wheezing and tightness in your chest for asthma sufferers. Among children with asthma, colds and flu are the most frequent causes of flare-ups.

There may be no surefire way to avoid catching a cold or flu, but there are plenty of ways to protect yourself as much as possible. Because those with asthma suffer deeper and longer from the effects of infection, it's smart to follow the right steps to avoid getting sick.

Before you get sick, the Mayo Clinic recommends the following preventative measures:

Get an annual flu vaccine unless your doctor recommends against it. Most adults and children older than 6 months of age should get a flu vaccination every year.

Ask your doctor if you need a pneumonia vaccination. Having asthma increases your risk of developing pneumonia after getting the flu.

Avoid contact with anyone



© ADOBE STOCK

who's sick. Germs that cause respiratory infections are easily passed from person to person.

Wash your hands often. This kills the germs that can cause respiratory infections. Carry a bottle of hand sanitizer to kill germs while you're on the go.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. These are the points where germs enter your body.

Do not share your inhaler or other breathing equipment with others. Germs can spread on surfaces.

If you catch a cold or come down with the flu despite all efforts, the clinic has another set of steps to help lessen symptoms and thwart the infections.

As with any illness, early detection and treatment are

key. If your asthma begins to flare when you're sick, seek an appointment with your doctor. Prescriptions such as antiviral medication or other drugs can help ease symptoms and prompt you along to a quicker recovery.

If you have asthma, you likely have an action plan designed to detect early warning signs of an attack. Should

you begin coughing, wheezing, experience tightness in your chest or shortness of breath, it's time to consult your plan and adjust your medication for these events. If you don't have a plan, make sure you develop one with your doctor.

Often the best medicine for colds and flu are the simplest: rest and drink plenty of fluids. Stay home and avoid infecting others and cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. You can infect others before and after your symptoms begin and end. If your doctor approves, try an over-the-counter medication. They provide no cure, but they can help you feel better.

Rely on your peak flow meter to monitor your airflow and test your lungs at the same time each day. Drops in airflow should be a signal to adjust your medication as directed by your doctor.

If your symptoms become more severe, seek medical help. These include worsening breathing trouble or an extremely sore throat. Watch for signs of pneumonia and get treatment if you develop these symptoms: a high fever, chills, sweats, sharp pains when taking a breath or a cough that brings up colored phlegm.

Colds and flu for asthma sufferers can be dangerous, even life-threatening. So developing an action plan, watching for signs and symptoms — especially in children — and fast treatment will go a long way in preventing a mild flare-up from progressing into a severe attack.

Checklist for Healthy Traveling

When winter rolls around, holidays and vacations beckon.

Many of us will engage in some sort of travel this season and not much can ruin a family get-together or vacation more than unexpected illness.

But staying healthy while traveling can be a challenge. Exposure is maximized, and we are surrounded by strangers in airports, on planes and buses and eat out and mingle among crowds more than usual.

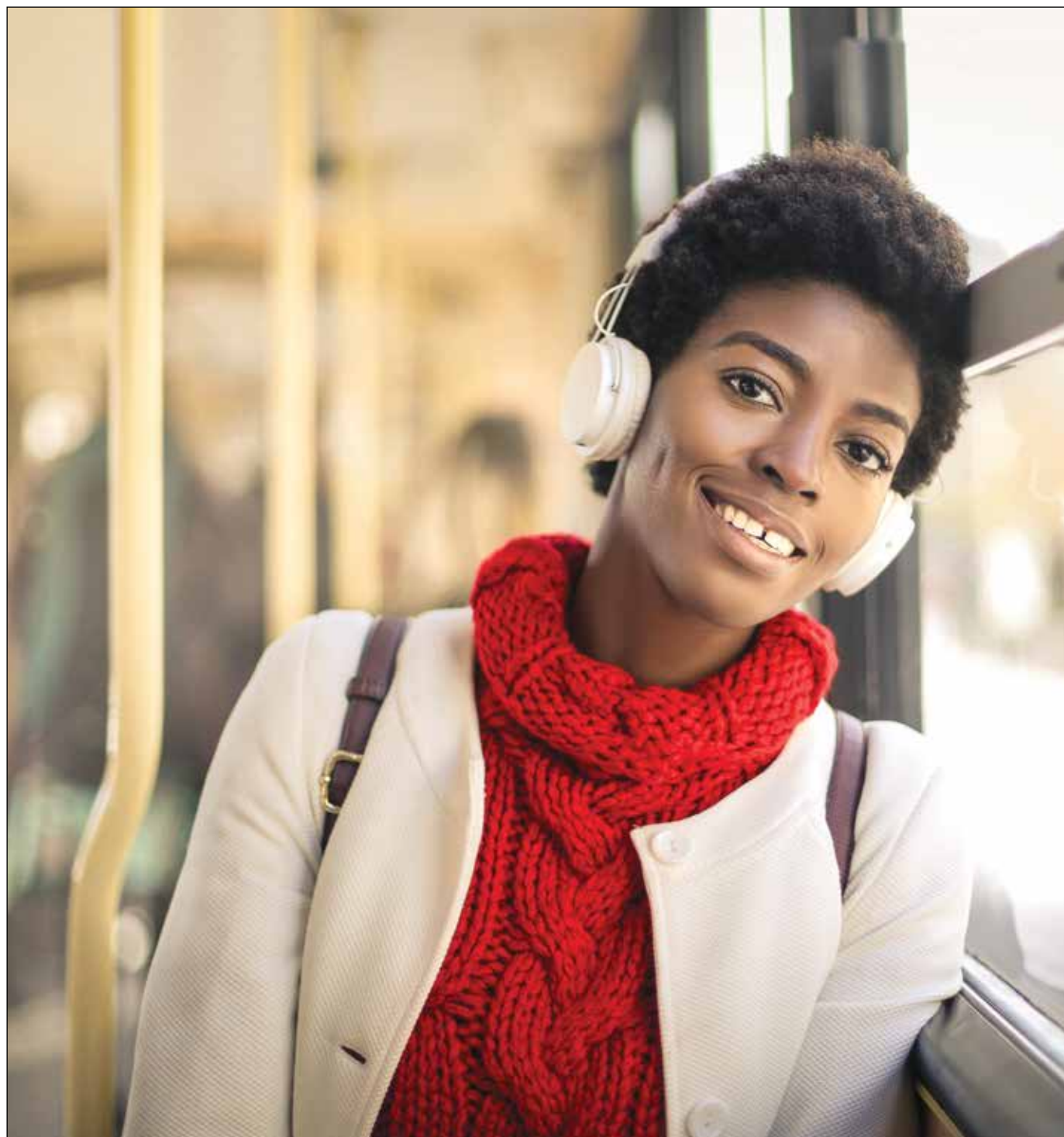
So whether your traveling long-distance or just across the state, it's wise to prepare. Here's a stay healthy checklist based on tips provided by the U.S. government's Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and the CDC.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Learn about your destination. If you're unfamiliar, do some research — especially when traveling abroad.

See a doctor before you travel. Disclose your plans in case your physician had special advice or recommendations.

Think about your health status. Are you too sick to travel? Think about any



© ADOBE STOCK

recent illnesses, injuries or surgeries and how they might affect your wellness and activities.

Do you have any special health needs? Special precautions should be taken with babies and small children, pregnant women, people with

disabilities, and people with weakened immune systems.

BE PREPARED

Pack smart. Plan your wardrobe around the weather of your destination and the places you travel through.

Plan ahead for illnesses or

injuries during your trip. Make sure you have your medications with you or can access them from your destination.

Know what to do if you become sick or injured on your trip. It's not always easy to find medical help, espe-

cially overseas.

Know and share important information about your trip. Always let someone know where you're going and how long you'll be gone. In an emergency, it may be difficult to make contact so it may raise flags if you're gone too long.

PROTECT YOURSELF

Pay attention to your health during your trip. Exposure to varying or unfamiliar weather can bring on illness.

Use sunscreen and insect repellent as directed. Remember, sunscreen is just as important under the winter sun as under the summer sun.

Be careful about food and water. Stay hydrated and eat well, but beware the source. Keep bottled water nearby or in your hotel, especially when traveling overseas.

Try not to take risks with your health and safety. Holidays and vacation travel can lessen inhibitions, so have plenty of fun but take the proper precautions.

Limit alcohol intake, and do not drink alcohol and drive. Sound advice anytime.

Wear protective gear when doing adventure or sports activities.

Pay attention to your health when you come home. Some diseases and illnesses, even the common cold or flu, can show up days after your return. Watch for any symptoms or signs that you're not feeling well and get treatment.

Winter Illness Myths

Separating myth from fact when it comes to contracting an illness, especially in winter, can mean discarding the causes and warnings that may have filtered down through your family.

Some myths seem to make sense — going outside with wet hair will make you sick, for example — but the truth is even more convincing.

“You get a cold or the flu because you get a virus,” said Dr. John Segreti, an epidemiologist at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. That doesn’t mean you should throw caution to the wind and go outdoors with wet hair, but that won’t make you sick. Maybe more miserable in harsh weather, but not sick.

Segreti and the medical experts at Rush University pooled their knowledge to help dispel some of the more persistent and plausible myths when it comes to staying healthy in winter in an article on the university website. Just break it to your mom or grandmother easily.

BODY HEAT LOSS

Chances are you’ve heard this one: You lose most of your body heat through your head. Again, makes sense, right? But research reveals people lose only 10% of body heat through



© ADOBE STOCK

heads. The smart advice: Keep your entire body warm in cold weather by wearing the appropriate clothing. And, of course, wear a hat.

GREEN MUCUS

True or false: Green mucus means you have a bacterial infection. False. Some worry when they expel green mucus, but the good news is that it actually means that an illness you already have is ending, not the other way around. For the record: Yellow mucus means your body is still fighting that infection, and cough-

ing up clear mucus is the sign of an oncoming illness.

FLU SHOTS

The myth that you can get the flu from a flu shot persists every year, despite the widespread facts and information disseminated that dispel it. It is true that the shot is not a guarantee you’ll avoid the flu, but it does protect against the most common strains. Even while the shot might prevent these strains from making you ill, new strains develop that are resistant to the vaccine (and no vaccine is 100% effec-

tive), likely ensuring the propagation of this myth into the future. But don’t let that stop you. Get the shot.

RADIATOR HEAT

Dry heat emanating from radiators can indeed make you miserable. It can dry out your nasal passages, causing nosebleeds and other discomforts, but like wet hair it won’t bring on a cold or the flu. Indoor heat from any source can present challenges, so be sure to drink plenty of water and moisturize to ward off its effects.

Shoveling Snow & Heart Attacks

At least one assertion, that shoveling snow is associated with a higher heart attack risk, actually rings true. The reasons are two-fold: Shoveling is more strenuous than most winter sports, according to a Rush cardiologist, increasing the workload on your heart while the cold has already constricted your arteries. If you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes, are over 60 or overweight, take extra care by going slow and using a smaller shovel.

Shop Smart for Healthy Foods

A healthy diet any time of year requires attention to your shopping routine.

During winter, many tend to pack on weight due the holiday overload, and some abandon their normal, healthy eating habits when the weather gets them down or facing the cold and crowds at the grocery store seems too much.

But if you plan ahead, shop smart and take advantage of canned goods and seasonal produce, you can achieve the trifecta of a healthy winter shopping excursion: you'll save money, reduce exposure and maybe even discover new foods you can enjoy all year long.

PLAN AHEAD, MAKE A LIST

Planning ahead and making a list before you go shopping is always smart. You can ward off extra trips for forgotten items and extra supplies, and you'll save time and money. One way to make shopping lists more fun is to design them around a series of menus or meals for the week. You'll kill two birds with one stone by never wondering what you're going to eat and you won't be as likely to fill the fridge or pantry with unnecessary or impulse purchases.

STOCK UP ON NON-PERISHABLES

You may avoid canned or



© ADOBE STOCK

pre-packaged foods or meals during other times of the year, but stocking up on these items can be a boon to your wallet and add unexpected, enjoyable flavor to your meals. Because many popular vegetables are out of season in winter, you'll at least benefit from some fruits and veggies. Again, shop smart and try to avoid products with excess salt, sugar or preservatives. Stocking up may cost more up front, but you'll have reserves for weeks to come while still maintaining a healthy diet.

DON'T IGNORE FROZEN FOODS

Just because it's cold outside, don't neglect a trip down the frozen foods aisle. Make the freezer your friend at home and the grocery store. While many fresh vegetables are out of season, frozen vegetables are flash frozen to retain their nutrients and are as healthy as fresh vegetables. When you do go fresh, buy enough to freeze for a second or third meal. No waste, no haste! You'll extend your buying power and minimize trips out to the store.

SEIZE THE SEASON

Discover new flavors, be adventurous and save money. These principles should guide you when shopping for winter produce.

You'll likely find deals on beets, Brussels sprouts and collard greens, among others. Winter fruit savings can also be had by choosing seasonal options such as grapefruit, pears and pumpkin. Do some culinary research or consult an in-store expert for intriguing recipes for winter produce and fruits.

GET IT DELIVERED OR PICK IT UP

More services are debuting, pushing the standard pizza delivery to the outer lane as drivers for services such as Uber and Door Dash race to bring you food from your favorite restaurants. Many grocery stores will now shop for you and store your purchases in a locker awaiting your arrival. The extra cost and added convenience are factors to consider, but everyone deserves a treat and avoiding the aisles may make winter sense.

Focus on Allergies

Winter is a season of good news/bad news for allergy sufferers.

The colder weather means relief from such allergens as pollens. But more time spent indoors means more time dealing with indoor allergens such as dust, mold and pet dander.

If you begin to sneeze and cough in winter and you haven't been infected with a cold or the flu, you may be wondering where those symptoms are coming from. According to the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, many sufferers develop the same symptoms as they do to pollen during other times of the year.

If you're uncertain what exactly you're reacting to, allergy specialists can help you pinpoint the cause. But if it's not severe the ACAAI has identified the most common indoor allergy suspects and what you can do to lessen your symptoms.

DUST MITES

Like most indoor allergens, dust mites know no season — it's just you're exposed to them more in the winter when you spend more time inside. If your allergy symptoms begin to become bothersome after vacuuming, sweeping or dusting, those mites have been stirred up and gotten to work. You can work to thwart dust allergies



© ADOBE STOCK

by using a vacuum with a HEPA filter, using mite-proof mattress and pillow covers, and regularly washing your linens in hot water. Installing a high-energy disposable in your heating and air-conditioning system can also help. Choose a filter with a high MERV rating.

MOLDS

Bathrooms and kitchens are the spawning grounds for indoor molds, made even peskier by the fact that most

aren't visible to the naked eye. Molds release spores into the air, activating off your allergy and asthma symptoms. Protect yourself by rinsing your nose with a saline solution after bathing. In the kitchen, take care to quickly clean up spills or leaks. Make sure your refrigerator and garbage cans are cleaned regularly. In other areas of the home, especially bathrooms and basements, dehumidifiers can reduce moisture and help reduce molds. If you're

working outdoors, wear a protective mask.

PET DANDER

Many people with allergies find they simply can't be around pets; others find effective ways to keep their furry friends if they develop an allergy caused by them. But that doesn't end their exposure or symptoms. Pets travel with their owners frequently, and so do allergies. Managing pet allergies takes some extra work and restric-

tions, but it's worth it to devoted pet owners. Make sure your pet gets regular baths. Wash your hands after petting or playing with your pet. Keep them out of your bedroom and vacuum with a HEPA filter.

If you're unsure about your allergies or they become more severe, see your allergist. That way you'll know the cause and the steps you can take to ease your symptoms — and begin enjoying life in winter again, indoors or out.

Check in with your Mental Health

There's a certain edge winter brings as your body adjusts to darker colder days. It's a feeling of being a little "off" or more easily irritated. This may also manifest itself in feelings of unhappiness, commonly known as the winter blues or seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

Because we operate on a natural body clock governed by circadian rhythms that regulate our sleep cycles and mood, the change in time can impact our mental health as our schedules continue to run out of time. These changes are also influenced by genetics and body chemistry, so they may affect some more than others.

Doctors and mental health professionals have long been aware of SAD and stress the importance of keeping the body and mind healthy during the winter season. Dr. Dominic Wu, a resident physician at Cambridge Health Alliance, a teaching affiliate of Tufts University and Harvard Medical School, offers the following tips for maintaining mental health by eating well, meditating and staying connected.



© ADOBE STOCK

WELLNESS

To help take that "edge" off, nothing works quite as well as exercise. A brisk walk in the cooler weather can help pump up your energy, or engaging in any sort of exercise for 30 minutes each day helps fend off stress and encourages your body to release endorphins, your natural "happy hormones" that may be hibernating.

Maintaining a proper diet is a challenge during the holidays, but staying on track with a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables can help you feel full. But also don't deny yourself the occasional indulgence.

We all suffer "down" periods marked by brief bouts of doubt, depression and anxiety, which

are not always symptoms of a larger issue. Meditation and mindfulness are increasingly widespread and popular techniques to help ease these symptoms. Practicing meditation just 10 minutes every other day has been shown to quiet busy, stressed minds, and plenty of podcasts and apps are available to help guide you in these sessions.

Similarly, meditative practice such as yoga, walks or relaxing to music can also bring relief.

Finally, staying connected with family and friends during winter — a time when we're more likely to spend time alone — is important in strengthening a sense of community. If you're feeling lonely or isolated, reaching out by phone or

arranging time for routine outings or just a cup of coffee can lighten your mental load.

LIGHT THERAPY

Long, dark days are a hallmark of winter, restricting our access to light-filled days that brighten our spirits. If you're feeling that darkness and it's affecting your mood, some studies show light therapy can be beneficial for those suffering from SAD.

This therapy uses fluorescent white light boxes to expose you to the sort of intensity you would experience on a sunny day. Exposure in the early morning for 12-18 minutes for about 30 minutes with your eyes open (but not staring directly into the light) is recom-

mended specifically for seasonal disorders. Many people place the boxes nearby during breakfast, and most tolerate the therapy well. But it is also recommended that you consult your physician before beginning light therapy, especially if you have eye disease.

Side effects, including headache, eye strain and nausea, are generally related to using the box later in the day, hence the morning therapy.

SEEKING MEDICAL HELP

If your seasonal disorder or symptoms of depression persist, it's important to notify your doctor. Depression can strike at any time of the year, so take note if any of these symptoms occur almost every day of the week:

- Depressed mood most of the day;
- Decreased interest or pleasure in activities that you used to enjoy;
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping more than usual;
- Moving slower or feeling more hyperactive during the day;
- Feeling tired and less energetic;
- Feeling worthless or excessively guilty;
- Difficulty concentrating more than usual; and
- Thoughts of death, suicide or harming others.

If you notice the last of these symptoms, seek medical attention right away. And be sure to check with your doctor to understand if you're suffering from SAD and if medical treatment might be beneficial.