

Keeping warm and well in cold weather

A guide for kidney patients



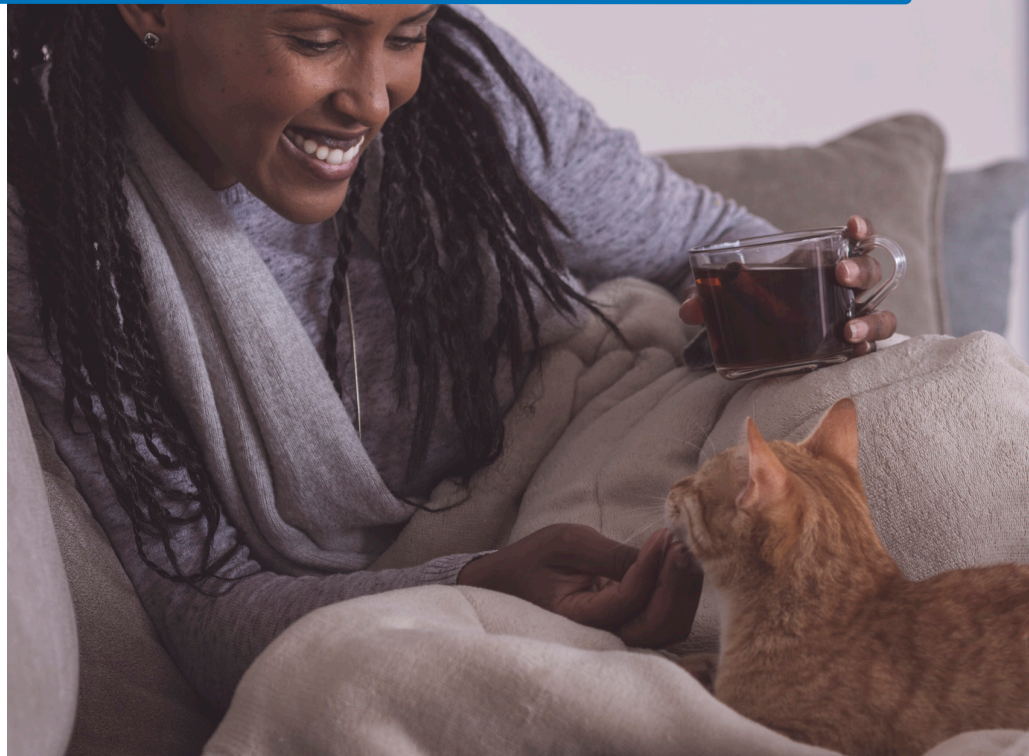
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The UK's leading kidney patient support charity

The icy blast of winter can be especially hard for people with kidney disease. Being cold can raise the risk of strokes, heart attacks and high blood pressure, as well as making us vulnerable to respiratory illnesses. Look after yourself during the colder months with our simple tips to keep you warm, safe and well.



Wrap up warm

A feeling of intense cold, whatever the weather, is common for people affected by chronic kidney disease (CKD). When you're at home, keep the room where you spend most of your time heated to at least 18°C if you can and wear lots of thin layers to trap the heat and keep your core warm. Choose wool, cotton and fleece fabrics and make sure you are wearing socks and slippers indoors. Hot water bottles and heat pads for your body or gloves may help, too. When you go out, layer up and wear thick socks and a warm hat.

Make the most of your heating

Colder, darker nights can mean bigger heating bills, but when it comes to keeping your home warm it's about working smarter, not harder. You are probably already doing all that you can to keep costs down, but simple tips like closing doors and turning off radiators in rooms you don't use as much will help keep your home at a stable temperature. Ensuring radiators aren't blocked by furniture (and not drying clothes on them) will allow the heat to circulate better and ensure you make the most of your heating. If you have smart controls or can use timers, these can help you heat your home without wasting energy.

Be prepared

People on immunosuppressants are at higher risk of osteoporosis (brittle bones) so do take extra care to avoid trips and slips. Dr Andy Stein, consultant nephrologist at University Hospital, Coventry, explains, "If you fall you may be more likely to break a bone if you are taking steroids such as prednisolone."

Put in your repeat prescriptions in plenty of time and get food and medicines delivered so you don't have to go out when the ground is icy. Ask family, friends and neighbours for support and check with your GP, practice nurse or local councillor about voluntary groups that will help if you are stuck.



Go to our **Cost of Living hub**
<https://www.kidneycareuk.org/col>



Use virtual appointments

Dr Stein says: "Particularly for older patients, coming to hospital can be a nightmare, from arranging transport to expensive parking to the risk of tripping and falling, and waiting around for hours. If you can get an online appointment, it's much safer."

Libraries often run free digital literacy sessions if you'd like some free one-to-one guidance about booking digital consultations with your medical team.

Get your jabs

Living with kidney disease means you are more at risk of complications from flu, pneumonia and Covid-19. It's important to speak to your GP and book your free vaccinations if you have CKD, are on dialysis or have a kidney transplant.

Almost half of people with CKD didn't get the flu vaccination last year, yet immunisation can save lives. "We strongly recommend vaccination, particularly for transplant patients, those not yet on dialysis or on immunosuppressant drugs," says Dr Stein. "If you get Covid-19 or a similar disease it can be very serious."

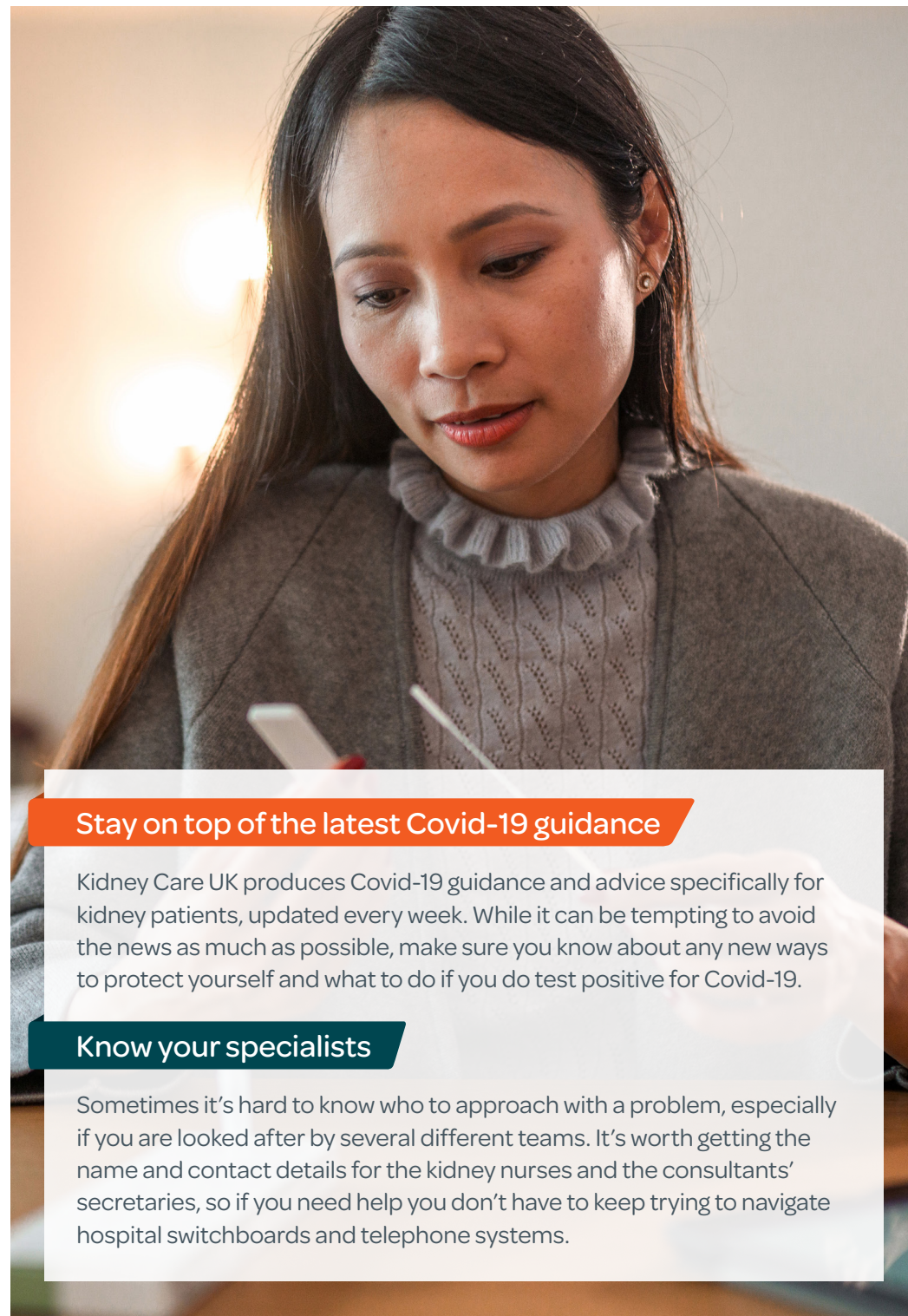


Stay on top of the latest Covid-19 guidance

Kidney Care UK produces Covid-19 guidance and advice specifically for kidney patients, updated every week. While it can be tempting to avoid the news as much as possible, make sure you know about any new ways to protect yourself and what to do if you do test positive for Covid-19.

Know your specialists

Sometimes it's hard to know who to approach with a problem, especially if you are looked after by several different teams. It's worth getting the name and contact details for the kidney nurses and the consultants' secretaries, so if you need help you don't have to keep trying to navigate hospital switchboards and telephone systems.



Stock your medicine cabinet

In cold, wet weather, try to keep your medicine cabinet stocked with over-the-counter medicines (like paracetamol) to help relieve the symptoms of winter colds, sinusitis and earache. Don't forget that some common medications, like ibuprofen, should not be taken by people with transplants or those with less than 50% kidney function.

Itchy skin can be one of the worst symptoms of CKD. Make sure you have plenty of soothing moisturiser at home. There's no need to spend big – luxury names aren't necessarily better than own-brand products.

Speak to your pharmacist for advice and remember to ensure that prescriptions are ordered and collected well before the festive season.

Check you're receiving all the benefits you're entitled to

If you've been too unwell to work you might feel unsure about what financial help is available to you. At Kidney Care UK we often hear from people who don't realise they are entitled to certain assistance, such as the winter fuel payments or the big energy companies' trusts and funds to support customers in financial difficulty. If you are struggling with the relentlessness of kidney disease, knowing that your utilities are not going to be cut off makes a huge difference.

Look at the advice on our website, use our Benefits Calculator and consider booking a free Welfare and Benefits Health Check with us.



Kidney Care UK's Free Benefits Calculator

<https://kidneycareuk.entitledto.co.uk>



Alert your utility company

If you are struggling with soaring energy bills, your provider needs to know you have medical problems. They have a duty to help vulnerable customers and you may be entitled to reduced tariffs or other help.

You should also tell your power suppliers that you have CKD so they can add you to the Priority Services Register (PSR). Power cuts are not a regular occurrence but when they happen they can be a real worry, especially if you do your dialysis at home. If your power does get cut off, call 105 to report it and get the latest updates for your area. If you are on the PSR, getting your power back on will be a priority.



Eat well (and enjoy it)

It is really important to eat well when you have CKD, but if you are on dialysis, cooking healthy meals is often the last thing on your mind. Our Kidney Kitchen recipes are specially developed for kidney patients, so you can be sure that you'll be preparing food that's nutritious and safe for you to eat (as well as delicious!). Look through a selection of warming wintery dishes on our website. Our new recipe collection, *Eat Well Spend Less*, is packed with tasty, low-cost kidney-friendly meals.

Visit the Kidney Kitchen

<https://www.kidneykitchen.org>



Keep active

Exercise helps to keep your body healthy and strong. When you're living with kidney disease, staying active helps give you extra energy to move around, carry out your daily tasks and enjoy your leisure time. Other benefits may include improved mood and sleep, healthier bones and muscles, lower blood pressure and an increase in dialysis efficiency.

Talk to your kidney team about what activities are safe for you to do. Exercise doesn't have to cost money, but it is important to choose an activity that you enjoy doing as you are more likely to stick with it.

Look after your mental health

Long-term conditions like CKD can affect different areas of your life as well as your health. Talking therapies could help – contact your GP practice for advice and support. Kidney Care UK offers free counselling for kidney patients. Visit our website or call us on 01420 541424 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm) to find out more.

Emotional resilience is about coping with your problems and finding a way to continue to live well, even when under considerable stress. You'll find an introduction to emotional resilience on our website.



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