



Keep Well this Winter

January 2010



www.kwtw.org.uk

Will it be a 'Happy New Year'?



The festive period and the start of the New Year has brought many challenges to older People, carers and care Services as temperatures plummet and the snow falls down.

Last year's Winter Related Death Statistics proved to be worse than forecast. The number of pensioners dying through cold related illness had risen from 1,370 in 2007/08 to 2,300 for 2008/09 in Wales. That's a staggering 67% rise in a year with more than 930 extra older people dying in Wales.

The combination of flu, cold weather and rising energy and food costs has fueled the exacerbation of hospital admissions and in some cases death of older people whose chronic medical conditions had been triggered by the cold and viruses.

Keep Well this Winter aims to provide advice to all older people on how they can keep warm, well and safe. All over Wales the campaign coordinators have worked hard to ensure voluntary and statutory services work together to reach the vulnerable. Much of this work relies on the goodwill of all parties and some great projects take place. It is particularly worrying then when we read of rising winter death rates.

These are challenging times when many older people's low income levels try to meet competing demands. Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales are campaigning to influence Welsh Assembly policy and get fuel charges supported or reduced for those who are in fuel poverty. The problem is the weather is very cold now and pensioners are struggling to keep their homes warm. On the next page you'll find some top tips, some suggested by older people themselves, which we hope will help.

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Will it be a happy New Year? - Top tips

With a challenging start to the new year for older people, we've compiled a list of top tips for older people and their carers. Many of the tips have come from older people themselves and could prove invaluable during the current cold weather.

For older people

Don't turn your heating down or off, use the KWTW thermometer and ensure your rooms are adequately heated at 18°C-21°C (64°F-70°F). If you're worried about the energy bills then make sure you are on the priority service register with your energy company which ensures your supply will not be turned off and you will be supported to pay off the bill throughout the year. Most importantly make sure you are receiving all the benefits to which you are entitled – ask Age Concern for a Benefits check by phoning 029 2043 1555.

Make sure you keep some tins of pudding, soup, beans etc and some powdered milk in your food cupboard. If you haven't got any then ask a neighbour who is going shopping but don't risk falling on the ice yourself.

Place some kitchen foil behind the radiators which will reflect the heat out into the room rather than it going into the walls.

Make sure you do not go from a hot room to a cold one. Switch

the heating on an hour before you need it in the room you are entering and switch off the heat in the room you are leaving an hour before you go – no extra heating costs and no cold rooms.

Wear plenty of layers and let your body heat trap between them and keep you warm.

If you do stay in bed a little longer to keep warm be careful when you get up. Get up slowly and sit on the edge of the bed for a while just in case you experience some giddiness. Taking this action could prevent a fall.

For carers and neighbours

Check older people's heating is regulated correctly to maximise the heat where it is needed and that it is used efficiently.

If there has been some reluctance to getting insulation or a benefits check use the cold weather to influence them that this is needed. It won't help now though it will reduce their bills or provide extra income in the future.

Ensure those you are looking after get regular hot drinks and have some food for emergencies in their store cupboard.

If you are worried that you can't reach someone because of the

road surface then try to 'buddy up' with a responsible person who lives near them. Most people are only too happy to help.

Remember that older people won't ask for help though often they are grateful for the offer of a warm meal or some shopping. If you do clear a path of snow put some salt on it to prevent it becoming icy and warn the older people that it still may not be safe to walk on. Common sense must be exercised in relation to health and safety.

If there are no lights on in the evening or curtains remain closed in the day then let services know or knock on the door as you could save an older person's life.

Hopefully this cold spell will soon be over. The experiences we are sharing and the lessons we are learning should be recorded to evidence the need for support for the KWTW Campaign.

To obtain a copy of the Keep Well this Winter information booklet, which contains similar tips as well as useful information about health and benefits, visit www.kwtw.org.uk or contact 029 2043 1555.

On to pastures new...

I would like to take this opportunity to wish Richard Jones the very best of luck in his new position as Public Affairs Officer with the Older People's Commissioner. Richard has worked for the past three years as the Administrator for the Healthy Ageing team and has been mainly responsible for putting together this Newsletter as well as giving excellent support to our team. Many of you know Richard and I am sure you will join with me to wish him good luck for his future career - the Commissioner's gain is definitely our loss.

Smooth way to be healthy

At a recent Keep Well this Winter event that took place in Cardiff, organisers showcased an innovative way to do some physical activity and get some of your '5-a-day'.

You may think Jim (pictured) is just having a laugh here. Well, he is but he is also hitting two 'Keep Well This Winter' targets.

As he pedals the bike, he is getting some of his 30 minutes

daily activity and provides power to work the adjoining blender. Into the blender Claire has put chunks of banana, melon, mango and pineapple juice.

The result after a couple of minutes pedalling? A mouthwatering fruit smoothie for Jim, his wife and 'Healthy Wealthy and Wise' friends to enjoy - and so having one of the '5 a day' portions of fruit or



vegetables that is part of a healthy diet.

For more tips about eating well and staying active during the winter months, visit www.kwtw.org.uk

Ask George

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales' Trading Manager has a regular column in the South Wales Echo newspaper in which he answers older people's questions on a range of topics.

As this week's questions were very much 'winter orientated' we thought we'd share George's answers with you.

Dear George, I am extremely worried about paying my electricity and gas bills. I have had my heating on constantly of late because of the recent spell of very cold weather. Is there any help I can get?

George says:

It is very important to keep yourself and your house warm, so if you've got central heating, please don't be afraid to use it. January traditionally is a time of year when many of us find that money is in short supply - this is why it is important that you contact your existing energy supplier or local Age Concern to see if there is a better and possible cheaper energy tariff available for you. It is worth

noting that some energy providers, such as Age Concern, can even help you offset your bills with special energy tariffs for older people. Your local Age Concern can also give you a benefits health check, which will help to identify whether there are any benefits that you may be entitled to, and help you claim any extra money that you should be receiving. It is also a good idea to try to insulate your house as much as possible, to keep the heat in and your bills down. I'd suggest that you should contact your local council to find out about projects and grants that are available in your area to help make your home energy efficient and so cheaper to heat.

Q2. I am worried that my home is not prepared for this harsh winter and if something does go wrong will my insurance company pay out?

George says:

I know what you mean - insurance companies expect the policyholder to keep their house in a good state of repair at all times. Most insurance companies will pay out on a

burst pipe due to freezing temperatures but if you are worried about the extent of your cover then you should telephone your insurance company or contact your local Age Concern office. Older people may find it difficult to keep their home in a good state of repair - perhaps they are not able to do as many of the jobs around the house as they once did or they simply can not afford to pay for repairs. Make sure your insurance company is sympathetic to older people's circumstances and needs - if it isn't, then you need to shop around for one that is, such as Age Concern and Help the Aged.

If you would like to submit a question for George then please write to: Ask George, Age Concern Enterprises Cymru, Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales, Tŷ John Pathy, 13/14 Neptune Court, Vanguard Way, Cardiff, CF24 5PJ or email george.burke@accymru.org.uk

Patients in Wales able to book GP visits online

Health Minister Edwina Hart has announced £1.7million of funding for a new website that will allow patients to book GP appointments, order repeat prescriptions and check their medical records at the click of a mouse.

'My Health Online' will also be linked to the existing NHS Direct Wales website and will feature advice and information to help patients manage health conditions.

Mrs Hart said: "The demand for online GP services is increasing and we recognise that providing accessible information is critical if we want to enable people to change their lifestyles and improve their health."

"The Welsh Assembly Government is also committed to health services for people living in rural communities. My Health Online will particularly save lengthy journeys to GP practices."

"The website will also help empower people to take responsibility for their own health through the completion of a health diary which can be shared with their GP."

The British Medical Association said any development giving better access to information will be welcomed but the system must be secure.

Dr Richard Lewis, Welsh Secretary of the British Medical Association, said: "Information systems are vitally important for ensuring good communication of health information, particularly in respect of patient care in the community."

"A considerable amount of work has already been done to develop information systems in Wales, but an awful lot more needs to be done."

He added: "This money will go some way towards ensuring there is an improvement in IT systems in Wales."

"Any development that improves efficiency and gives better access to information will be welcomed by doctors but we must ensure that these systems are secure and retain the confidence of the public."

Work will now start on developing the exact details and requirements of the website, there have been some criticisms that the services it offers will not reach the most vulnerable people in Wales.

Ros Williams, Health Initiatives Coordinator at Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales said: "My Health Online has the potential to benefit many older people in Wales, particularly those who are housebound or live in rural areas."

"Many older people in Wales, however, still do not have access to the internet, often for financial reasons, so at a time when living costs and energy prices are so high it is unlikely that they will be able to utilise what the new website has to offer."

France sells off surplus swine flu vaccine

France is selling off millions of surplus swine flu vaccine doses to other countries, officials say.

They say the move was decided after health authorities found they had more than enough to deal with the outbreak.

Germany and The Netherlands announced similar sales late last year. The H1N1 virus appears to have peaked in North America and parts of Europe.

However it remains active elsewhere. More than 11,500 people worldwide are believed to have died from swine flu.

A French health ministry official told AFP on Sunday: "We started with a plan for two-dose vaccinations but since one dose is sufficient we can start to resell part of the stock."

The government bought 94 million swine flu vaccine doses - more than one for every French person - and started vaccinating

in October although only about five million people are recorded as having been vaccinated in France so far, AFP reports.

Le Parisien newspaper quotes officials as saying Qatar had bought 300,000 doses and Egypt was negotiating to buy two million.

Last week the head of the World Health Organization Margaret Chan said it was "premature" to say that the H1N1 pandemic was over.

Look out for listeria

A new leaflet by the Food Standards Agency has been produced to warn older people about the dangers of listeria.

The number of cases of listeria in people over 60 has doubled in the past nine years and one in three of the people who get food poisoning caused by listeria die as a result.

Listeria is a type of food poisoning bacteria that can live and grow in food - and it's chilled food in particular where you need to be careful, for example pate, cooked sliced meats, soft cheeses and smoked fish.

It is widely known that pregnant women need to avoid certain foods because they contain listeria, but the fact is that anyone over the age of 60 is also at a higher risk of listeria. The same is true for anyone who is ill or who had a long-term medical condition.

According to the Food Standards Agency, you can avoid listeria by taking a closer look at the following three things:

1. The 'use by' date

'Use by' dates appear on food that goes off quickly. Given the chance, listeria will grow rapidly in your food so make sure you store it in the fridge and eat, cook or freeze it by the 'use by' date shown on the label.

Even if the food looks and smells fine, using it after the 'use by' date could put your health at risk. Don't take the chance, throw it out.

Remember, the 'use by' date is different from the best before date, which you'll also see on some food labels. The 'best



You should take extra care with some foods to reduce the

before' date is more about the quality of the food than its safety. Once food is past its 'best before' date it doesn't mean it will make you ill, but you might find that it starts to lose its flavour and texture.

2. The temperature of your fridge

Make sure your fridge is cold enough because this will help stop food poisoning bacteria like listeria from growing in your food. Your fridge should be between 0°C and 5°C (32°F and 41°F).

If you are not sure how the temperature setting or dial works on your fridge you could use a fridge thermometer to check it's the right temperature.

3. The storage instructions for your food

Food that goes off quickly usually has storage instructions on the label that say how long you can keep the food and whether it needs to go in the fridge.

This sort of food often has special packaging to help keep it fresh for longer. Once you open it, however, the food will go off quickly.

This is why storage instructions also tell you how long the food will keep once the packaging has been opened. For example, you

might see 'eat within 2 days of opening' on the label.

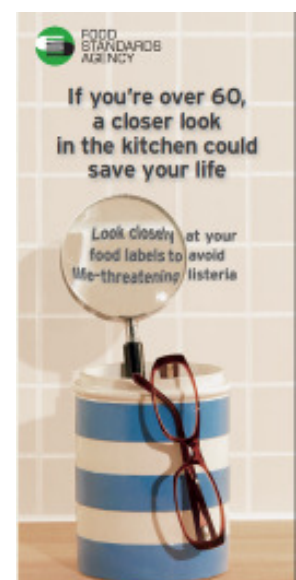
You can keep some foods for longer if you freeze them, as long as you freeze them before the 'use by' date.

Always check and follow any storage instructions on the label carefully.

The leaflet has been praised for clearly communicating a complicated message and has been given an award by the Plain English Campaign.

A spokesperson said: "Food safety and healthy eating messages are often based on complicated science, but the Agency strives to make these messages as accessible to as many people as possible. We are therefore pleased that these efforts have been recognised by our partners and by the Plain English Campaign."

To obtain a copy of the leaflet, visit www.food.gov.uk or contact the Food Standards Agency Wales on 029 2067 8999.



Planned abolition of cheques causes concern

The recent announcement of plans to abolish cheques as a form of payment in the UK by 2018 has been criticised by consumer groups, business lobbyists and charities that represent older people who raised fears that vulnerable people, who have relied on a cheque book all their lives, will be left confused.

The controversial plans, designed to increase security and reduce processing costs are the result of a decline in the use of cheques which has fallen from around 11m a day in 1990 to the current level of around 3.8m a day.

A growing number of stores such as Tesco and John Lewis have stopped accepting cheques but they are still widely used for making payments to tradesmen and for utility bills.



Cheque usage has fallen by around 65% in the UK in the last 20 years

Andrew Harrop, Head of Public Policy for Age Concern and Help the Aged, said: "This move by the Payments Council will leave millions of older people worrying about how they will manage their finances without cheques."

"2018 is the date set for the withdrawal of cheques, but we are concerned that this will give the green light to banks and retailers to start phasing them

out even sooner. Chip and pin is problematic for many older and housebound people and we know 6.4 million over 65's have never used the internet. Without cheques, we are very concerned people will be forced to keep large amounts of cash in their home, leaving them vulnerable to theft and financial abuse."

"The Payments Council needs to urgently come up with some practical alternatives to replace cheques or it will be condemning thousands of older people to extra worry, cost and financial insecurity."

Case study: The difficulties faced by older people

Miss Williams (not her real name) is housebound and an agency shopper collects her shopping for her from her local supermarket. By arrangement with the supermarket, she used to give her shopper a pre-signed cheque to pay for the shopping, but in 2007 the supermarket stopped accepting cheques.

She has now set up an ad-hoc arrangement with the supermarket where the shopper does her shopping which goes through the till. They take the till receipt and a cheque from Miss Williams to customer services. Customer services rings Transax, which runs a cheque authorisation service for the supermarket and they authorise the cheque.

Although this system works now, it involved a great deal of organisation for Miss Williams, the supermarket and social services (which employs the shopper). It also involves extra cost for Miss Williams as she pays the shopper for the extra time it takes.



Age Concern Benefits Checker

It is estimated that £4.6bn in benefits go unclaimed by older people every year.

Visit www.ageconcern.org.uk to find out how much you could claim

Improved care for stroke patients in Wales

Hospitals across Wales are providing better and more efficient care for stroke patients thanks to a number of new ways of working.

The All Wales Stroke Services Improvement Collaborative (AWSSIC) has been helping healthcare teams to improve the care provided to patients in the first seven days following a stroke.

Significant progress has been made to ensure there is a rapid recognition of symptoms and emergency, specialist treatment is available, in properly equipped units, with appropriately trained staff.

The improvements are helping to ensure stroke patients receive the right treatment, at the right time and in the right place.

Dr. Anne Freeman, ASSIWC Clinical Advisor and Chair of the Welsh Stroke Alliance, said: "Stroke is a preventable and treatable disease but urgency is the key."

"Swift action can limit damage to the brain and dramatically increase a person's chances of surviving and avoiding long-term disability."

"The earlier the symptoms of stroke are recognised and the patient is admitted to hospital, the better the recovery."

There are around 11,500 strokes in Wales each year with the majority affecting older people.

It was not necessary for there to be a sense of urgency about the

diagnosis of stroke until recently, but recent research has shown that the quicker the treatment, the better the outcome for the patient so all stroke patients in Wales are now treated as a medical emergency.

Every health organisation in Wales has been closely monitoring how quickly they are able to provide assessments and treatments on a patient by patient basis and they have been using this data to quickly assess the impact of any small changes they make to improve the efficiency and consistency of care.

The new ways of working have made a number of improvements including:

- Earlier recognition of symptoms and more rapid diagnosis of stroke.
- 50% reduction in the time for a stroke patient to be admitted to a specialist stroke bed from A&E.
- An increase in the number of people who are helped out of bed within three days of a stroke which improves recovery.
- Measures to reduce the incidence of chest infections in stroke patients.
- Development of specially trained stroke teams to support patients including nurses, speech therapists, physiotherapists, dieticians and occupational therapists.
- Development of stroke information packs for patients and relatives.

Dr. Freeman said: "We have made great progress and it has been an exciting 12 months."

"The changes made so far have made a real difference to the treatment and care for stroke patients, particularly in terms of recovery.

"But there is still more that needs to be done to ensure Wales is delivering a world class stroke service."

"The next steps now are to continue working with stroke teams to provide more patient centred care and improve local services, including rehabilitation.

"No matter how fast and effective health organisations can provide stroke services, the outcome following a stroke still depends on how quickly an individual who experiences the symptoms of stroke seeks emergency medical attention.

"I would urge anyone to learn how to recognise the signs of stroke and seek help immediately."

The recent FAST campaign supported by the Wales Centre for Health has helped to raise public awareness and understanding of stroke as a medical emergency.

FAST stands for 'Face, Arm, Speech, Time' and urges people to look for any changes to a person's demeanour and then to seek medical help immediately.

For more information on FAST, please visit www.wales.nhs.uk/actfast

Diary dates for coming months

Over the next few months Keep Well this Winter events and activities will be taking place throughout Wales to provide older people with help and advice to keep them healthy during the winter period.

If you are running an event that you'd like us to list in the newsletter and on the Keep Well this Winter Website, please contact Ros Williams on 029 2043 1552 or email rosalyn.williams@accymru.org.uk.

Real life stories request

The key aims of the Keep Well this Winter campaign include improving the health and quality of life of older people in Wales. Real-life examples of this can motivate those involved with promoting the campaign by showing what difference has been made to older people. Also, access to a human interest story can be the difference between the media giving press attention to the campaign and highlighting campaign messages, or rejecting the story.

If you know of any real-life stories of how the campaign has helped an older person and could share the story either anonymised or with the older person's consent and identity revealed, then please contact Ros Williams on 029 2043 1552.

February newsletter

It is important that everyone is aware of KWTW activities that are coming up as well as successful events or initiatives that have already taken place. Please forward up-coming dates, articles, photos and ideas to: Ros Williams - Tel: 029 2043 1552; Fax: 029 2047 1418; email: rosalyn.williams@accymru.org.uk

The deadline for the next newsletter is Friday 22 January 2010.

The Editor reserves the right to alter submitted articles.

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Useful websites:

Keep Well this Winter - www.kwtw.org.uk

Welsh Assembly Government - www.wales.gov.uk

Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales - www.agecymru.org.uk



HELP THE AGED WE WILL

**Help the Aged yng Nghymru
Help the Aged in Wales**

Keep Well this Winter is coordinated by Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales, a new charity dedicated to improving the lives of older people.

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