



Cold, stiff and achy?

Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Society of Physiotherapy!

How did you enjoy that cold snap that whistled through the country recently, bringing frost, sleet and snow?

Winter has its ups – snuggling under a fluffy blanket in front of a crackling fire, hot chocolate in hand, or striding through a bright, crisp winter's day, wrapped up in woolly beanies and down jackets, your dog and child bouncing beside you.

But for many of us, it's a time of increased discomfort. "When the weather's cold, muscles are less flexible, and this can lead to discomfort," says Rogier van Bever Donker, member of the South African Society of Physiotherapy's national executive committee. "We also are often less physically active in winter, which boosts the pain and debilitation." Pain from arthritis seems to get worse in the winter, the cold can also cause blood vessels to constrict, which can lead to headaches and even migraines.

How to deal with winter pain?

- "Start with the most obvious method: warmth," says van Bever Donker. "A hot bath can soak away some pain, as can a microwaveable cushion, the kind you get in pharmacies, applied directly to the aching place. The nerves that deliver the aches in cold weather *love* warmth."
- Keep yourself hydrated. We are made up of more water than any other substance, so we are dependent and rely on liquid lubrication. Yet winter is a bad time for dehydration; many of us simply forget to drink, missing thirst cues when we're immersed in work. Sometimes we are so out of touch with our bodies that we eat rather than drinking – listen to your body and give it what it wants!
- "You don't need to drink a specific amount every day, but it is a good idea to teach yourself to be aware of thirst, and to drink regularly during the winter's day."

- Dress for the day – layer your clothes so that you can adjust as the day warms up or cools off.
- Be aware of the need to be consciously active – the more exercise you get, the more supple and flexible joints and muscles will be. You don't have to gym for hours – an hour or even less of brisk walking each day is excellent therapy for aching muscle and bone.

If you struggle with exercise and find it a painful practice, especially in winter, don't hesitate to call your physiotherapist and ask for help. Physiotherapists are trained to tailor-make exercise programmes for their patients. They can help ease stiff joints with some simple movements you can easily repeat at home.

Go to www.saphysio.co.za to find a physio nearby.

Enjoy winter!

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