

1 Eat up

When the weather is cold we tend to eat more, which explains why some of us gain weight during winter. But did you know your blood pH balance (the acidity or alkalinity of the blood) also has a part to play? 'The cold weather can lower blood pH, making it more acidic and causing the enzymes that run our metabolism to slow down,' says Marion Hauser, registered dietician and co-author of *The Hauser Diet: A Fresh Look At Healthy Living* (Beulah Land Press, available online). 'If you feel the cold easily, try eating foods that will help to raise the alkaline levels, such as lean meat, fish, eggs, nuts and dairy products. You can also eat healthy comfort foods. 'Hot soup and stews are ideal and provide us with lots of vegetables and fibre,' says Dr Elisabeth Weichselbaum, a nutrition scientist at the British Nutrition Foundation. Spicy foods are also a good option. 'Capsaicinoids, the substances responsible for the burning sensation in spicy food, are associated with the release of feelgood endorphins, plus spices stimulate circulation and can temporarily raise your body temperature,' she adds.

2 Get moving

Although the onset of winter may make you feel like slumping on the sofa, don't let the weather keep you from staying in shape. Try hot yoga, which can help you tone up and boost mood, too. 'Bikram yoga is designed to work every muscle, ligament, tendon and joint in your body, and get your blood moving around,' explains Bill Phwaites, senior teacher at Sohot Bikram Yoga, London (www.sohotbikramyoga.co.uk). Each class is carried out in a studio heated to 41°C. 'The



Crash course: Warming up

Stay cosy through the cold months with our tips and tricks to keep chills at bay

heat helps your body to open up by loosening the joints and muscles and allowing for safer, deeper stretching,' says Phwaites. 'This form of yoga can also help to elevate mood levels by promoting the release of endorphins, and the fact that you are pushing yourself will also go a long way towards raising your energy levels.'

3 Go natural

Cold weather can cause vasoconstriction (a tightening of the blood vessels), which can

result in poor circulation, according to Manfred Kaiser, author of the book *How The Weather Affects Your Health* (available free on Google Books). 'Ginger is one of the best herbs for circulation, especially when taken as a tea,' reveals Healthy expert and medical herbalist Gabriella Clarke. 'It works by increasing blood flow to the extremities, so is great for those who complain of cold hands and feet.' Another herbal winter warmer is capsicum. 'This spice can be

added to most savoury dishes in the winter months and may even help ward off colds,' says Clarke. And a study in *The Lancet* found that the herbal supplement ginkgo biloba improved bloodflow and reduced pain in sufferers of Raynaud's, the poor circulation condition. Essential oils can also be beneficial – try a few drops of tangerine in your bath. Japanese research suggests this, too, can encourage circulation.

4 Be mindful

A plummet in the temperature not only brings about physical problems, but also mental challenges, too. As the mornings darken and the days shorten, many of us experience feelings of lethargy and it can be all too easy to stay in and lounge around. 'Part of the problem with winter is that people change their social habits,' says psychologist Professor Geoff Beattie, dean of psychological sciences at the University of Manchester. 'People spend too much time in winter watching television, which we know has a mildly depressive effect.' So what can be done to keep our mood levels up? 'Find an activity to get yourself involved in,' explains Professor Beattie. 'Psychologists call these "flow activities" – consuming hobbies in which you can get fully engaged.' And make the effort to meet with friends. 'Avoid becoming socially isolated, get out and see people,' he says. 'The opportunity to share things and connect with others is highly beneficial as it helps you put your own life into perspective.' For around seven per cent of the population though, the change in season causes more than just a case of the general winter blues, but the onset of seasonal affective disorder – see p14 for more. 