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Keeping warm in a cold spell

The Alzheimer's Society shares tips to help people with dementia during the cold weather.

Cold weather can be challenging for older people, especially for someone living with dementia, according to the Alzheimer's Society.

The charity is urging people to check in on loved ones with dementia this winter and has shared some useful tips to help support them:

Make sure the person is dressed appropriately

Layers are key to keeping warm, and the best materials for maintaining body heat are cotton, wool or fleecy fibres.

If you're going outside, remember that a lot of heat is lost through the head and neck, so make sure the person has a hat and scarf on. Gloves are also important to keep hands warm.

Keep the room warm

As well as turning the heating on, things like draught-proofing, thermal curtains and roof insulation can help maintain a consistent temperature.

Try to make sure any rooms that are occupied during the day are kept warm – it's a good idea to aim for around 20 degrees Celsius.

Encourage regular movement

Keeping active can help to boost circulation and keep someone with dementia warm.

Simply getting the person to move their arms and legs or wiggling their toes can be helpful.

Make the most of daylight

Decreased sunlight can cause someone with dementia to feel



The Alzheimer's Society is encouraging people to check on their loved ones during cold weather Image: GETTY

increased anxiety, confusion and even depression during winter.

Get outside when you can – a quick walk around the block can do wonders.

Be careful in icy weather

Perception issues can make it difficult for someone with dementia to see icy patches on a pavement or understand that a

surface may be extra slippery.

If you're out for a walk in icy or snowy conditions, make sure you're supporting them carefully. Encourage them to take smaller steps and walk more slowly than usual.

Eat and drink regularly

It's important to make sure someone with dementia is eating

regular meals and drinking enough fluid during the winter.

Some people with dementia have trouble gauging the temperatures of food and drink, so try to make sure it has cooled before giving it to them.

For advice, call the charity's support line on 0333 150 3456 or visit alzheimers.org.uk



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How to garden when you have back pain

Robert Bailey, chiropractor at Diss Chiropractic Clinic, shares his top tips on how to continue to enjoy gardening when you experience back pain.

We've already reached that time of the year when the phone on my reception doesn't stop ringing with patients calling for help regarding back pain that was brought on through gardening.

Low back pain is Britain's most common health problem and gardening is one of our favourite past times, so it's of little wonder that so many people find themselves in pain after spending too long out in the garden.

A lot of people think that

getting recurrent, severe episodes of low back pain is par for the course when it comes to being a green-fingered enthusiast. I can't say that I wholeheartedly agree with this.

I appreciate that placing our bodies under a reasonable degree of physical challenge is likely to lead to some episodes of aches and pains, but there's no reason that you can't enjoy working in your garden and retain a low level of back pain.

So, if it is possible to have both, the question is: How do you do it?



If you experience back pain while gardening, chiropractor Robert Bailey (pictured far right) recommends switching up the activity to something different

Images: GETTY/DISS CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC

One of the most common patterns that I find with the patients that I encounter is that they go hell for leather out in the garden during the summer, then

they spend the majority of the winter doing very little.

It's important to know that our bodies are really good at tolerating activities that we do

regularly and that remain within our physical tolerance, i.e. activities that don't cause injury.

Regularly stressing the tissues of our bodies leads them to



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Continue your gardening activities through the winter months if you can, or replace them with something else, such as strength-based home exercises so your back remains tolerant to physical stresses

become tougher and more resilient – think about the calluses that would form on your hands if you were to use a spade regularly!

However, when we stop these activities for an extended period of time, we begin to lose the tolerance that we have built up. In the case of my green

fingered patients, when they stop gardening over the autumn and winter months, they lose the tolerance in their low backs that they have built up over the

spring and summer. This means that when they come back to gardening the following spring, their bodies can't tolerate as much as they did the previous year. The advice that I would give is to keep gardening through the winter months so that your back remains tolerant of your regular gardening activities. This will make it less likely that it will flare up the following year when the weather improves. The other option is to replace the gardening with another form of challenging exercise through the winter. This could be as simple as regular exercise classes or even some basic strength-based home exercises. We run weekly pilates classes that are very popular among our gardener patients for this reason. The other question that I am regularly asked is: What do I do to prevent the pain if I start feeling it when gardening? This is an important question, but one that has a very simple remedy. I get my patients to make sure that they are varying activities. For example, if you are on your hands and knees doing some weeding and your back starts to

feel uncomfortable, I would recommend changing your activity and doing something else that is completely different, such as pruning a hedge or standing to re-pot plants. The key here is to make sure that the two tasks you are performing are completely different. Having two tasks on the go that have very different physical demands means you are less likely to overwork the back. When you find that your back is continuously uncomfortable, regardless of what task you are doing, that is the time to get the kettle on and take a break. It's important to remember that you want to challenge your back, as that is the only way that you will create resilience within the spine, but you need to remain respectful in the degree of challenge you give it. You can't keep challenging your back all day, every day because it needs time to recover as well. As a clinician, I like to give my patients free reign to remain active and do the things they want to do, provided they are doing it in a sensible way. Implementing these two pieces of advice is a great place to start.



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Sing along and socialise from the comfort of your home

Homechoir is helping people pursue their musical passion without having to leave the house.

Singing is great for the soul – no matter your age. Beyond retirement, it can become trickier to attend singing classes, hear music as clearly, or find other people to sing with.

Thankfully, today's virtual world offers plenty of ways to keep your vocal cords active and meet fellow singers in the process.

One of these is Homechoir, a digital choir founded in 2020 by Ben England, a conductor and former school music teacher.

Ben launched Homechoir during the Covid pandemic after realising he couldn't continue to run his community choirs and orchestras under lockdown restrictions.

It saw him awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2020.

"The most important thing to me was keeping my choirs going – both to support my family and for the sake of the choristers," said Ben. "Many were retired, dealing with health issues or bereavement. I wondered how to keep everyone together."

He found the answer in YouTube, which he describes as "an extraordinary educational resource".

"I experimented with a camera and found I could use my 30 years of choirmaster experience to produce a little sing-song session," said Ben.

"I put it online, and within a week I had 1,000 people – not just from my choirs, but from around the world – singing with me. We now have people who watch live from Australia late at night and a lady in California in her 80s who gets up at 3am to sing along."

Homechoir runs three live sessions a week, covering traditional and classical choral pieces, plus other music including sea shanties, folk, gospel and children's songs.

Anyone is welcome to watch and sing along with Ben or catch up on the recordings in their own time.

"Some people sing while doing the ironing; others are completely invested. One lady even built a vocal booth in her wardrobe!" said Ben. "But all I expect is that people enjoy themselves and get



Ben England started Homechoir in 2020 in response to the Covid pandemic. Below, people can sing along at home and are welcome to submit clips for a whole-choir recording
Images: HOMECHOIR

what they need from it."

The 'one-way' nature of the broadcasts means people can participate with no pressure, although they are welcome to submit clips through a 'Sing and Send' service, which Ben then turns into a whole-choir recording.

"I mix it together in the studio – removing coughs, dog barks, and so on – and the end result sounds like it was recorded live in one place," said Ben.

The singing is just one part of what makes Homechoir so special to its subscribers.

Every broadcast has a live chat where singers can interact with each other, forming new friendships in the process.

"It's also about giving people a way to connect," said Ben. "The singing is a big part of it, but the community and live chat are where people find each other and support each other."

This is particularly valuable for older singers who may have lost loved ones, or who are

unable to leave the house.

"Many choristers go through difficult times – grief, illness, caring responsibilities – and to see others rally around them is profoundly moving," said Ben.

While the broadcasts are free for subscribers, each session raises money for a chosen charity, and singers are also welcome to donate to Homechoir as a means of supporting Ben and his family.

Liz Fletcher, a Homechoir singer who lives near Attleborough, is full of praise for Ben.

"I consider Ben a friend," she said. "He's a brilliant pianist and teacher. His knowledge and humour are wonderful."

Liz started singing at school and took it up again in 2000, joining Wymondham Choral Society before discovering Homechoir after the pandemic.

When she was in hospital last October, Ben played a song that Liz had recorded for Homechoir to let her know the community



was thinking of her.

"People can feel very down, then they listen to Homechoir, listen to Ben, and it cheers them up," said Liz.

"If someone is ill or having trouble, there is massive support;

it's like a whole community of friends. I wouldn't want to be without it."

For more information, visit homechoir.org or subscribe at youtube.com/homechoir

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