



**HEALTH TIP:** Eggplant is a rich source of phytonutrients, which are known to increase cognitive ability and improve brain health



Beets are high in immune-boosting Vitamin C, fiber, and essential minerals like potassium and manganese

SAJU SHELAR



# How to breathe easy

With winter on the horizon and a resultant spike in air pollution, a number of ailments could lay you low. Here's how to keep them at bay

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**T**he mercury has not yet registered a dip, but as the season begins to change, the process is bringing with it a fresh set of respiratory woes for Mumbaikars. Earlier this week, the city was covered by a haze as air pollution levels spiked. The air quality, as recorded by the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research, a research-based initiative that functions under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) of 142 on Monday morning which worsened to 177 by evening. While an AQI between 101 and 200 is considered moderate, it could cause problems for people who are especially affected by air pollution. For the record, the city's AQI stayed below 100 until the last week of September. City doctors report a nearly three-fold increase in the number of respiratory illnesses during the onset of winter. This can be attributed to denser air caused by decreasing temperatures which, in turn, causes concentrated pollution in the lower atmosphere, says Dr Salaah Qureshi, MD, Medicine at Axis Hospital. Also common at this time of the year are pollen allergies, which can aggravate the symptoms of people with chronic respiratory conditions, says Qureshi. Here's how to keep illnesses at bay this winter.

## Asthma and bronchitis

"Winter air is drier and can irritate your airways, leading to increased incidence of asthma attacks and bronchitis," says Qureshi. The

effects are more severely felt by those suffering from chronic lung disease, he says.

### Counter this by:

- Being regular with medication
- Incorporating yoga into your day, especially asanas that open up the chest, nose and sinuses, says Munmun Ganerwal, nutritionist and fitness consultant at Yuktahaar. Asanas such as the surya namaskar, navasana, dhanurasana, salabhasana and ustrasana are especially helpful, as they eliminate mucous and congestion, she says
- Using humidifiers at home and office
- Holistic lifestyle practitioner Dr K Kumar recommends moistening your respiratory tract, especially your nostrils, with a few drops of ghee or oil

### Influenza and swine flu

The onset of winter is also synonymous with influenza outbreaks, with swine flu topping the list of concerns for urban Indians, says Dr Rohan Aurangabadwalla, pulmonary consultant at Apollo Hospitals.

### Avoid this by:

- Getting annual vaccines. While these should ideally be taken at the onset of the monsoon, you could minimise your chances of contracting the flu with a pre-winter shot, says Dr Aurangabadwalla. Bear in mind that the vaccine takes roughly two weeks to become active.

- Improving your immunity. Focus on improving your gut health by consuming fermented foods, says wellness coach Pooja Duggal. Luke Coutinho, holistic lifestyle coach, also advises upping your consumption of citrus fruits to boost your immunity. "Pineapples contain an enzyme called bromelain that cleans out your lungs. Also, boost the functioning of your liver to improve your immunity by taking a combination of 1 tbsp each of olive oil and lemon juice on an empty stomach early in the morning for three days. Apple cider vinegar, when consumed 30 minutes before your meals, can also improve your liver health," he adds.
- Dr Manoj Kutteri, Wellness Director at Atmantan Wellness Clinic, recommends eating walnuts, berries, beans, apricots, grapes, oranges, carrots and broccoli to improve the health of your lungs. Further, herbs and spices such as ginger, black pepper, cinnamon and basil can also improve immunity, says Ganerwal. She advises boiling grated ginger in water until the solution changes colour, and straining and serving it with honey and lemon juice. The drink, she says, helps keep your sinuses clear

### Allergies & inflammation

Increased air density prevents routine circulation and traps smoke

and other pollutants closer to the Earth's surface. This makes atmospheric pollution an even more serious concern this time of the year, says Dr Kutteri. "With Diwali coming soon, the air will become polluted with metallic particles such as aluminium, manganese and cadmium, as well as sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and other particulate matter. This increase in atmospheric pollution can have lasting, detrimental effects on our health. In the short term, one sees a steep rise in the number of cases related to phlegm, chronic cough and breathlessness, along with allergic rhinitis, asthma, and lower respiratory tract infections," he says. The change in seasons also leads to higher amounts of pollen in the air, which can cause allergies to flare up.

### What you can do:

- Minimise exposure to areas where a large number of crackers are being burnt
- Use air masks as far as possible.
- Use air filters at home and in the office and travel in closed vehicles, as far as possible
- Coutinho recommends breathing exercises such as kapalbhati to improve your air circulation
- House plants that purify the air, such as bamboo palms, lady palms, areca palms, dracaena, flamingo lily, English ivy, Boston fern, snake plant and holy basil are also welcome additions
- Ganerwal suggests a bedtime drink of golden milk — turmeric with ghee and black pepper — to invigorate your lungs. The addition of ghee and black pepper is essential to bring out the antioxidant effects of turmeric, she says.

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