

# Winter health Nothing to sneeze at

It has been a tough twelve months in the health sector. Common viruses have been unseasonably active and particularly harsh, even through the summer months.

As winter approaches, retailers and manufacturers should ready themselves to support the consumer's ongoing need for off-the-shelf winter remedies, cold and flu symptom alleviators, immune boosting supplements and alternative treatments. Good nutrition is also key for winter wellness. This means your entire store can participate in the Winter Health category.

## Healthy food – immune boosting nutrition is on the rise globally and locally

“ One of the basics of good winter health is good nutrition.

Foods that offer high nutritional value and have either immune boosting or cold and flu fighting benefits are ideal for marketing and promotions now. ”

Nourishing soups, and stews packed with carrots, broccoli, kale, peppers, onion, garlic, turmeric, and ginger will provide plenty of warming nutrition, while seasonal winter fruit and vegetables and fresh juices are great sources of vitamins. In the UK, the Daily Mail reports that tinned fish, particularly



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flavoured tuna, as well as sardines and mackerel are becoming increasingly popular with consumers looking for healthy yet more affordable animal-based protein options.

## Take a multi-pronged approach and involve your entire store in keeping your shoppers healthy this winter

These same consumers are also embracing vegetable-based pastas such zucchini, sweet potato, and squash. South African consumers are starting to learn that adding lean proteins as well as a rainbow of fruits and vegetables to their diet is one of the best ways to prevent colds and flu from taking hold this winter. You can inspire your customers to stay healthy with a selection of healthy winter recipe ideas on your social media channels.

### Supplements: vitamins, minerals, probiotics & other health boosters

Shoppers now expect a range of health offerings from their favourite stores, from superfood powders and shakes to immune boosters, antioxidants, and daily multivitamins. For winter, think vitamins B, C and D and zinc for stronger immune systems, calcium for absorption, and Omega 3 to keep hair and skin healthier in drier/colder winter months.



Vitamin C also improves blood flow and helps to regulate body temperature. Probiotics contribute to a healthy immune system, while echinacea, garlic and ginseng help to prevent or treat colds and flu. Consumers also use green, herbal, and fortified teas for their health benefits, as well as herbal, holistic and natural remedies.

## OTC Medication – Schedule 0, Complementary, and Alternative Medicine

### The South African market – an overview

OTC or off the shelf medication for fighting the symptoms of common colds and flu include tried and trusted analgesics and antipyretics, as well as treatment for dehydration, nausea, congestion, and sore throats. Your choice of arsenal here is huge, so selecting an appropriate range based on accurate sales data analysis is crucial.

In a recent report by ResearchAndMarkets.com, it was reported that “Drug stores and pharmacies [are] the leading channels in the distribution of OTC healthcare in the country.”

Convenience stores, and hypermarkets and supermarkets were named as the next two most common channels, while Pharma Natura (Pty) Ltd, Weleda Ag, and Reckitt Benckiser Group plc were named by the report as the top three companies in the South African OTC healthcare sector. It is important to note that Pharma Natura produces solely homeopathic remedies – an interesting picture of the local market can be inferred when looking at the company’s success.



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Supporting this is a GlobalData report, which states, “The South Africa over-the-counter (OTC) healthcare market size was valued at \$633.4 million in the year 2021. The market is expected to grow at a CAGR of more than 3% during the forecast period. The South Africa OTC healthcare market report provides insights on high growth markets to target, trends in the usage of category level distribution data and companies market shares.”

The report goes on to add that the leading categories in OTC are traditional medicines, cough and cold preparations (including antihistamines), first aid kits, indigestion preparations, and medicated skin products.

### Traditional medicines lead the way for local consumers

According to ResearchAndMarkets.com, “The South African OTC healthcare sector [was] led by the traditional medicines category in value terms in 2021.” However, while ResearchAndMarkets.com also forecast that the topical OTC medicines category would register the fastest value growth during 2021-2026, GlobalData predicted that traditional medicines would have that honour. Suffice to say, it’s a category that could offer significant opportunities to retailers agile enough to think outside the box.

### OTC on the rise as South Africans reach for affordable at-home treatment

The cost of healthcare is rising, and South Africans are becoming more health-conscious and health-savvy. Instead of heading to the GP at the first sign of a cough or cold, they are more likely than ever to take matters into their own hands and treat at home first. Analysts agree that consumer preference for OTC medication in the cough, cold, and flu remedies market is growing at a consistent rate. It’s easily available, often more cost-effective than prescribed medication, and consumers can stock up on their preferred treatment combinations ahead of the winter flu season.



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The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) sent out an alert in mid-March 2023 stating that RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) season had started, and detections are increasing steeply already. The cold and flu season is likely to follow suit. In response, retailers can expect to see a sharp rise in both OTC sales, as well as an increased interest in immune-boosting, cold-fighting supplements, foods, teas, and other holistic treatments and prophylactics.

**Home delivery services & e-commerce drive OTC growth**

In an Insight Survey article published on Bizcommunity last year, it was noted that “Dis-Chem’s online sales have surged, now comprising 18.1% of the company’s sales for the six months ended August 2021. In response, the Dis-Chem group deployed 44 new e-commerce hubs and increased investment in its e-commerce platform. Furthermore, the launch of home delivery services, such as PharmaGo and Dis-Chem’s Deliver D, offer a convenient means of obtaining cough, cold and flu remedies, further supporting the preference for at-home treatment in the local market.”



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**Winter health home products**

**Nebulisers, humidifiers, cleaning products, soaps & sanitisers**

Home products like humidifiers and air purifiers are part of the care-at-home set-up. Nebulisers are becoming more common place as upper respiratory infections become more virulent. In addition to medical equipment and products that provide healthcare support, hygiene and sanitation are critical. Covid-19 taught consumers the importance of preventing the spread of disease, so expect an uptick in sales of hand sanitisers, soaps, and other personal and household cleaning materials.

**Affordable, effective winter health care**

South Africans are struggling to afford professional healthcare and are relying more and more on themselves, and their supermarkets or health and wellness outlets. Affordable, accessible, and easy-to-use medications are essentials this winter. In the same vein, prevention is now more important than ever, and shoppers are more knowledgeable when it comes to healthy eating, supplementation, and general wellness. Expect them to act on it. **SR**

**Sources:**

Dietitians share the five food trends set to be big in 2023 | Daily Mail Online  
 South Africa Over-the-Counter (OTC) Healthcare Market Forecast to 2026: OTC Healthcare Sector Forecast to Register CAGR of 36% during 2021-2026  
 South Africa Over-the-Counter (OTC) Healthcare Market Size by Categories, Distribution Channel, Market Share and Forecast, 2021-2026



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