

Winter 2020

NephroCare

for me

A happy recovery from  
Covid-19

“Have you eaten your  
rice today?”

Gifts from the heart

*“Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.”*

Tich Nhat Hanh

## Welcome!

Dear Reader,

One of the characteristic features of the year 2020 has been the Covid-19 pandemic. It affects us all, but in very different ways. That is why this NephroCare for me issue deals with how people cope with the pandemic. A nurse from Italy tells one of her patients' moving story in **A happy recovery from Covid-19**. We have gathered **nurses' experiences** in Spain on how they coped with giving their best to their patients. There are a couple of reports from different countries outlining their specific challenges and solutions. The staff are on the same page in their conviction: **We stand in this together**.

As winter is approaching and temperatures are going to drop, it is time to boost the immune system. Your health is always importance to us. To give you some guidance, we have put together an article on preventive measures against infection with Covid-19, the flu and a common cold: **How to get through a cold winter without a winter cold**.

Not everything is about Covid-19, though. Not in our lives and not in this issue. One focal point is our **rice special**. Where does rice come from? How is it cultivated? What is good to know when dealing with it in your kitchen? We also tell you the story behind the title question: **Have you eaten your rice today?** It goes without saying that our recipes are about rice, too. Winter is the time for cosy meals and cooking together. Therefore, we chose a **one-pot chicken and rice** dish and a **beetroot risotto with parmesan and walnuts**. They look and sound delicious. Enjoy!

Winter is also the holiday season. Did you know how many different traditions people celebrate in their respective countries? If you don't, you will discover a lot in our article, **Let's celebrate – it's wintertime**. Do you like to give homemade presents to your loved ones? Then you might find a couple of suggestions in **Gifts from the heart**.

Have a good time with this NephroCare for me issue, stay at home, keep warm and, most importantly, get through the winter without a cold. Enjoy the holiday season!

Until next time,

Your NephroCare for me Editorial Team



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## Nurses' experiences during the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has confronted people around the world with considerable challenges. Primarily the nursing staff has fought real battles for their patients. Nurses from NephroCare clinics in Spain report about their touching experience.



**Javier Pio**  
RO centro de diálisis  
Fresenius Medical Care  
Sevilla-San Carlos, Andalucía.

»Undoubtedly, we are experiencing one of those events that, having been known only from stories of our elders or history books, seemed typical of other times. Now, however, we are direct protagonists of a pandemic, of a crisis that the future will brand as historical. Its resolution depends on our performance as an individual, as a society and as a health professional.

There is a differentiating factor in every story with a happy ending, a key element that effortlessly counteracts the prevailing negative tendency. Here and now these are the values of our staff.

Faced with the uncertainty caused by the unknown, the fear generated by an invisible enemy and the doubts that take over our spirits, the first of our values as health personnel arises:

**COMMITMENT.** Commitment to our colleagues to be more than ever a team. Commitment to our patients. More than ever, we feel the renewed desire to provide them with

the best of our care and seek the best possible treatment.

**RESPONSIBILITY.** Living up to the unique instinct of being professionals, and keeping it separate from the reality of also having a family and personal concerns. Professionals who constantly aim at adapting to the new work guidelines required by the circumstances.

**SUPPORT** and **FELLOWSHIP**, the mutual support to face our fears in the beautiful common spirit of spontaneous offerings to help, to take over the burden in difficult moments.

**EMPATHY**, the value that allows us to recognize ourselves in others. It enhances communication as a team, the support within and the recognition of work well done. It manifests itself day by day and gives strength to the group as a whole.

**DELIVERY**, despite all adversities. We are professionals in the dialysis room while we fight against the fatigue from emotional stress because we are dealing with an unknown situation and uncertain profiles. We know how to be professional and not give away the knot in the throat because we have to greet our children from a distance to protect them from ourselves.

**OVERCOMING.** Together we will overcome adversity by coming out strengthened from

the challenge that life has brought us, both as people and professionals. Doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, caretakers and maintenance, cleaning staff, administrative staff in our clinics will be strengthened. From that, we grow.

Everyone can choose to emerge stronger from adversity and learn from what has been overcome. To all of the Fresenius Medical Care team in Spain: Thank you very much!



**Maria Luisa Leo**  
RO centro de diálisis  
Fresenius Medical Care Plasencia,  
Extremadura.

»I attended a conference with epidemiologists and virologists. They explained the situation, what was known about Covid-19 and what was expected. I wanted to be able to explain to all the colleagues what the virus consisted of and to solve the doubts of the colleagues. Every day, first thing in the morning, I would gather the staff to give them the latest news and explanations. We were all afraid of the unknown situation, we also have sensitive people in our families, but the treatment of patients has not been affected. **There were smiles and kind words that kept the fear outside.**



**Anna Segui**  
RO centro de diálisis Fresenius  
Medical Care Reus, Cataluña.

»We are going through some hard weeks, well very hard. We are experiencing a multitude of feelings, some so contradictory to each other that they are even difficult to express in words. But, amid all these horrible feelings, different ones appear **when, from the first day, the staff volunteers to work, to give up their vacations, their free days, to do triple shifts. I also want to include the thanks to all our patients, for the work they do every day and for always being there.**



**Maria del Carmen Pérez**  
RO centro de diálisis Fresenius  
Medical Care Murcia-El Palmar.

»We all joined together and began to expand our protocols by measuring the temperature at the entrance, distributing masks, hand disinfection ... we all collaborated until our patients understood it, including removing food from the center. We have passed moments of uncertainty, but got through it together, even without touching you felt the hand of your colleagues on your shoulder. We experience hard times that will make us stronger, but I don't think there is a better place to do it than in our clinics, with the support of the NephroCare family.



**Marisol López**  
RO centro de diálisis Fresenius  
Medical Care Hospitalet, Cataluña.

»These weeks have been long and hard. We have worked without ceasing, without thinking and without hesitation. Little by little, we – patients and staff – have all learned to manage the feelings while we are returning to a relative “normality,” without taking our eyes off that virus, which is still there, without letting our guard down, but with more strength and integrity. Now we begin to collect the fruits. Patients who have gone through Covid-19 begin to return. The welcome is super exciting when they can report that the virus is gone and return to their homes. The joy on the part of everyone is immense.«



**Maria Teresa Curiel**  
RO centro de diálisis  
Fresenius Medical Care Madrid-Moncloa.

»During the first week of March 2020, the first colleague came with symptoms compatible with Covid-19. Following the protocol established at that time, the assistant had to leave her job immediately and contact Public Health. Without thinking twice, the other nurses offered: “Maybe, don’t worry, we take on the additional duties.” We still had no idea of what was to come. We have that bond with our patients who are quieter, sometimes grumpy, missing roommates they last saw days ago, not daring to ask. We continue giving them the best of us. Now we show them our smiles with our eyes, provide them with advice on how to protect themselves, and how to overcome this. We invite them to let off steam, express themselves, and congratulate them because they are exemplary. How much are they teaching us! How much they are giving us! Hopefully, no one will ever forget what this pandemic is teaching us.«



**Sonia Sánchez Díaz**  
RO centro de diálisis Fresenius Medical Care Valencia.

»All this time, it has served me to be aware that fear also has to do with loneliness, with internal worries. On the other hand, happiness, laughter and joy have to do with people. And if I have learned anything during this strange and unusual setting, it is to appreciate the wonderful people around me. My colleagues have been and are my family. They have made me smile when they saw me sink, they have wrapped me up. I have never felt alone with them. We form a great team, a great family. I can never thank for everything I received. I knew they were great professionals, now I have realized how great they are as humans.«



**Rosa Lázaro**  
RO centro de diálisis  
Fresenius Medical Care  
El Pilar-Madrid.

»During these past weeks there has been a lot of fear and uncertainty. Fear of human loss. Fear of not sufficiently supporting my team. Uncertainty about the decisions made. Will they be the best? There have also been delightful surprises, as the immensely valuable involvement and collaboration of the staff. But what I feel most every day when I come to work is gratitude. I feel incredibly grateful to my team who have done their best to keep the unit rolling smoothly. And I am infinitely grateful to our patients, who, with all their fears and insecurities, have collaborated without complaint in the changes in schedules, shifts and protocols.«



**Mercedes Martín-Cleto**  
Nursing Director.

»When the year began, much of my thoughts were directed to how we were going to celebrate our year, the International Year of Nursing. I knew it was going to be an exceptional year, but I never thought it would turn out this way. I am one of the people who believe that everything that happens to us in life happens for a reason. Although it is impossible to believe, I think that we are giving even more value to our profession from this horrible situation. Now more than ever, I am proud of the professionalism, dedication, commitment, sacrifice and affection with which my co-workers treat our patients, which goes far beyond a dialysis session. Our patients are the reason for our daily work. It seems that we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and that is when I am convinced that, very soon, we will be able to celebrate our year as it deserves to be celebrated.«



**Maite López Arévalo**  
RO centro de diálisis Fresenius Medical Care  
Barcelona-Diagonal, Cataluña.

»These have been challenging days both at work and on a personal level. When a patient or colleague was crying and my only consolation could be words when the best would have been a big hug. There were hard moments when we had to say goodbye to a patient sick from the virus. There were exciting moments when patients returned who had won the battle. The entire team has rowed in the same boat and the same direction for staff and patients, for me, they are all my heroes. We will not lower the guard because together we will win the battle!«





## A happy recovery from Covid-19

Italy was the first European country to be reached by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also the first country to report the fortunate recuperation of one of their patients who defeated the disease. Her NephroCare nursing team supported her through the healing process. Here, they tell her story.

»Shortly after New Year's Eve 2020, Francesca attended her regular dialysis treatment. When she showed symptoms of fever, coughing and severe breathing difficulties during the treatment, we were immediately alarmed. After alerting 118, the Italian number for medical emergencies, she was admitted to the hospital with a Code red. Two weeks later, she was discharged with a diagnosis of "bacterial pneumonia in follow-up." Little did we know. Francesca passed the months of January and February in apparent good health. When she came to our NephroCare centre on the Third of March for consultation, she was in good shape as usual. Still, during her dialysis treatment, she developed new symptoms with chills and exhaustion but no fever. We contacted the patient on the morrow to find out about her health status, and she reported that she was feeling well.

At the time, the national health system – especially in our region – could not yet guarantee an adequate and rapid screening of suspect patients. We did not get clear indications from the reference hospitals that managed infected patients either. So, given the increase in Covid-19 cases in Naples city, we decided to treat her in so-called cohort isolation for her following treatments. That means we treated



her together with patients showing similar diffuse symptoms, but separated from patients without symptoms.

Showing up for the treatment on 18th March, Francesca reported slight fatigue, but she was free of fever. Sudden chills during treatment were accompanied by fever and respiratory distress. We immediately contacted the emergency to hospitalise our patient. A few hours later, the emergency service operators informed us that Francesca had refused hospitalisation. Her justification being that she had already started to feel better during her transport to the hospital, could breathe more easily and her blood saturation had objectively improved.

Alas, from that time, Francesca entered a state of panic. She did not want to go to the hospital due to the staggering increase of Covid-19 cases, afraid that she would not survive this new – and uncharted – pathology. Due to several unfortunate bureaucratic circumstances, she couldn't perform a swab for a Covid-19 diagnosis, either. Francesca resisted several attempts to hospitalise her, given the progress of symptoms. Obviously, her state of horror had taken over. We couldn't think of any reason other than a psychological block triggered by fear. Meanwhile, Francesca needed her dialysis treatment at our clinic. All the same, the dire concomitants did not deter our staff from treating her with extreme affection, understanding and empathy.

Finally, thanks to the family doctor's involvement and the team working together to manage the patient's fears in the best way possible, we effectuated a swab test on 27th March. As we had feared, the test confirmed the Covid-19 diagnosis. Although immediate hospitalisation was arranged, her condition worsened and was treated with a drug therapy combined with a CPAP helmet.

In the following days, we were happy to find out that her condition gradually improved, despite her previous respiratory disease resulting from a series of comorbidities. Francesca was discharged from the hospital fully recovered from Covid-19 on the Eleventh of April, after three negative swabs and an overall improved general health.

On returning to the haemodialysis centre, Francesca had realised that her recovery had not been a foregone conclusion, considering her previous respiratory condition. She ex-



pressed her gratitude to us for having assisted her and how much she appreciated that we had shown respect and empathy even in her most challenging moments of struggling to accept the disease.

Her respiratory situation was still compromised and needed a slow but gradual recovery, but her emotional state was clearly improved. She gradually got past the state of fear through the dawning awareness that the best option to fully recover would be to put all clinical recommendations into practice.«

Thank you to the nursing team from NephroCare Italy, for sharing Francesca's story. With the support of all involved health professionals, she has fully recovered from her Covid-19 illness. Although she consented to her story being told, she did not want it to happen under her real name and photograph. We respect her request and wish her all the best! ●



## We stand in this together

The Covid-19 pandemic challenges all of us in unprecedented ways.

Fresenius Medical Care is doing everything in its power to continue to provide the best possible care for patients worldwide. This includes maintaining the production and distribution of vital products. In all this, the health and safety of patients, nursing staff and employees is of the highest priority.

Some countries have been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak more than others. As the crisis developed, Fresenius Medical Care units worldwide collectively pooled their power, effort and dedication to face the situation and protect patients and employees as much as feasibly possible. In a state of crisis such as this pandemic, the Fresenius Medical Care plan for crisis management sets in. Through centrally coordinated weekly calls with the Regional Crisis Response Teams, the entire network stays connected, ensuring that safety measures are implemented all over the European, Middle-East and African countries (EMEA). Here are a few highlights from some of the EMEA countries that show how conscientiously the teams reacted.

### SPOTLIGHT ON FRANCE: The 'Solidarité' initiative

The health crisis we all have to face is unprecedented and challenging. The lockdown we have been living through for several months has been restricting everyone's freedom. Not only were our patients living with the need for dialysis sessions as part of their everyday life, but they also counted among the so-called high-risk group due to CKD. Faced with all

those extended preventative measures, we figured they might experience this notion of restricted freedom more acutely. So, we felt it essential to take action. Therefore, we decided to phone those close to our patients and provide them with full information on Covid-19, preventative measures to be implemented and warning signs. Our aim was to raise awareness among their loved ones and support them in feeling safe about knowing what to do when our patients returned home. We have named this proactive initiative "Solidarité" (solidarity).

**Bernard Thuillet**, Managing Director of NephroCare Occitanie commented on this original and engaging idea: "Great innovative and radical ideas often emerge from crises such as the one we live through. The Solidarité initiative is one of these very ideas, borne out of our commitment to our patients."

Between 7th and 10th April 2020, 75% of NephroCare Occitanie patients were called by the Fresenius Medical Care France teams to remind them and their families of proper protective measures and give them essential advice during troubled times. As the Nephro-

Care centres' staff could not take on this additional workload, the Chronic Dialysis sales and marketing teams immediately offered to contact around 2500 families of the NephroCare patients concerned. Three of the contributors to the telephone campaign shared their experience.



**Perrine Rapebach**,  
Regional Therapy  
Manager:

"The family members are well aware of the severity of this exceptional health situation, which adds additional stress to their loved one's chronic illness ... We feel their concerns about being affected by the virus, being vulnerable people. During the calls, we can tell they feel relieved to see the measures put in place by the NephroCare clinics, and they need to be reassured of their practices at home.

*"During the calls, we can tell they feel relieved to see the measures put in place by the NephroCare clinics, and they need to be reassured of their practices at home."*

The kindness and involvement of families have touched me. Protective measures were already employed, even beyond those recommended. Most of them have mastered these recommendations and an unwavering willingness to do things thoroughly, just like healthcare staff. During conversations, we sometimes become the "confidant" of these

families; they take advantage of this moment to open up about their family's past and experiences such as illness, divorce, death. My greatest satisfaction is the gratitude you get from all those contacted and the respect given to this initiative."

*"I found it motivating to calm their concerns and provide them with crucial information to protect themselves and their loved ones."*



**Annie Wawczak**,  
Regional Therapy  
Manager:

"When we talk with families, we become aware of the need for guidance, responses to questions, support and listening, with the situation being so worrying. They know that the dialysis patient is more at risk to Covid-19 and express their fears. I found it motivating to calm their concerns and provide them with crucial information to protect themselves and their loved ones. I should say how well it was received and how attentively people listened during each call. You feel useful, indeed.

Some family members feel isolated and ask me to continue checking in. Many open up... We have to keep listening and advise on how to adjust to their living conditions. To every call, there's a moment of surprise; you have to adapt. Others want to prolong the interview... It's not easy to say goodbye." ►



**Jules Pena,**  
Haemodialysis Product Manager:

“I found our mission extremely useful and received a warm welcome. Families are afraid for their loved

ones during this period because, as we know, patients with CKD are at risk. Throughout the calls, I could see that we are not all equal in this situation. The further I got through the contact list, the more I realised the diversity of their social and economic conditions. Some patients work from home, others need to find work during the lockdown, some live in extreme solitude. But there are also the families who live together, caring for their loved ones, taking over all aspects and monitoring every move of this vulnerable relative.

*“This initiative has been a gift to me. It has put things in perspective for me to manage this isolation and realise that we all have to overcome the same obstacle ... We are coming to realise that we are all connected and part of something bigger.”*

In the end, these calls were not just a professional mission. Little by little, these conversations became a moral necessity. I felt useful. This initiative has been a gift to me. It has put things in perspective for me to manage this isolation and realise that we all have to overcome the same obstacle. We now know that

the health and fate of others will no longer be alien to us. We are coming to realise that we are all connected and part of something bigger.”

**SPOTLIGHT ON SPAIN:  
From rumours to reality - preparing for Covid-19**

When we first heard in the news what was happening in Wuhan and how many people were infected with a new virus, we weren't really worried: “It is nothing more than the flu, but with a higher transmission rate,” so we thought... Then Italy was hit and the situation quickly escalated. By then, we knew ourselves that this was serious, much more serious than what we had been led to believe.

**Protecting our patients and staff**

We immediately explored how we could protect our patients, our employees, ourselves, our families and our surroundings. We knew we needed to take action and move fast, as the situation could escalate quickly.

In collaboration with the Regional Crisis Response Team, we began to elaborate guidelines to prevent Covid-19 transmission and supported the clinics in implementing these guidelines. During a crisis, consistent processes are crucial. These specifications help provide our patients and staff with the best protection and ensure the best possible control over the situation.

We were sure that we would do everything to protect our patients and staff once they entered our clinics. When the first Covid-19 cases showed up, things happened in a rush until the Spanish Government decreed a total lockdown on 30th March.

There were many moments of stress, sadness and helplessness. We anticipated events as best we could, but we could not always prepare for them in full. Masks, medical gowns and tests were in short supply, our medical colleagues were asking for help we couldn't always give, but we kept on working. When we got the first two Covid-19-positive patients to be dialysed in our clinics, we did it. Solidarity and vocation prevailed, and we were determined to fight the situation and get things done. After all, we are like family at our NephroCare centres, staff and patients together. That makes us strong.

**A ray of hope**

After a couple of weeks, we began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. The rate of new cases in our clinics was stabilising, the growth rate of new cases decreasing. Our patients started to recover. We will keep on fighting because we know deep down inside that together, we will overcome every challenge.

**SPOTLIGHT ON SERBIA:  
From patient waiting room to dialysis clinic in just four days!**

During the Covid-19 crisis, the Serbian team faced the unprecedented challenge of turning the patients' waiting area into a 24-station dialysis clinic at breakneck speed. In only four days (and four nights) the teams did a tremendous job of realising this challenge.

On 15th March 2020, Serbia moved into a state of alert due to the evolving Covid-19 pandemic. The country was faced with the massive task of organising the safe treatment of thousands of dialysis patients. This led to the reorganisation of the healthcare system and the available dialysis facilities. Within an



*In only four days, the team from Serbia turned a patients' waiting area into a dialysis unit.*

existing clinical structure, a temporary dialysis centre had to be created to respond to the needs of the haemodialysis patients at the Clinical Hospital Zvezdara.

Fresenius Medical Care Serbia was informed of this need on 25th March. So, following an inspection of the facilities on 27th March, the team began preparing a fully functional ▶



The team from the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic.

dialysis ward equipped with 24 stations and providing dialysis on a 4-shift basis. The centre had to be operational at 6 a.m. on 1st April, which meant the team had just four days to complete it.

The multi-disciplinary team rose to this incredible challenge. The NephroCare team in Serbia is grateful for all the help, effort and dedication they received to make the operational dialysis clinic happen. This experience empowered the team to start treatments and be there for their patients.

**SPOTLIGHT ON THE UK:**  
**Collaboration and teamwork to provide the highest standard of patient care and protection**

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to cause unease and uncertainty across the globe, one constant are our staff members who do justice to the task ahead. We work in an industry

where they are privileged to be part of saving and improving lives every day, but we know this is no small burden to carry. In the UK and Ireland, hundreds of employees demonstrate immense bravery, strength and tenacity.

Across the UK and Ireland, compliance with strict government guidance on social distancing has resulted in all team members being required to adapt rapidly to new working methods and maintain continuity in our working routines. Employees whose remaining on-site was not considered essential from an operational perspective have been sent home with immediate effect and asked to adopt a new normal – working productively in a virtual manner. We also developed a comprehensive checklist of criteria our teams could use to determine each clinic’s suitability for potential cohorting of patients and staff. Adapting our working routines to the challenging situation boosted the team spirit and brought clarity to our decisionmaking and treat-

ment procedures. It also gave us leeway to fully concentrate on the patients once more.

**SPOTLIGHT ON ITALY:**  
**Local activities during the Covid-19 outbreak**

Italy has been hit particularly hard by the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, our staff members’ personal life, social habits, and work style were somehow affected. Despite the challenges, the spirit in the Italian team remained strong and positive. The approximately 4,000 dialysis centres worldwide have further strengthened the existing safety and hygiene regulations. Clinics and hospitals around the world have done the same, of course.

*“The approximately 4,000 dialysis centres worldwide have further strengthened the existing safety and hygiene regulations. Clinics and hospitals around the world have done the same, of course. Due to the enhanced hygiene regulations, more equipment was needed.*”

The need for isolation and the occurrence of kidney failure increased due to Covid-19. Consequently, a direct result of the crisis was an increased overall demand for acute dialysis machines. We were able to respond to this need thanks to the concerted team effort of all colleagues who put in the necessary steps from organising the urgent supply of the material to installing and validating the machines. For example, the team rallied together

to support one of Milan’s major hospitals in equipping a brand-new emergency Covid-19 intensive care unit with our dialysis machines in just one week.

We are very proud to see how by working closely together, we can make a big difference, not just to the lives of our chronic kidney patients, but also to other patients affected directly by Covid-19. To demonstrate our support to the local situation, our Italian production plant and Fresenius Medical Care Italia made a significant donation to the local hospital in Crema.

As soon as the crisis began, we immediately initiated daily coordination with the local authorities to harmonise measures to contain and prevent the virus’s spread. This is how the plant experienced no delay in production. It has continued manufacturing activities while applying the strictest protection and safety measures, of course. In keeping up the production, we were able to support patients’ treatment in the clinics and contribute to dialysis procedures running smoothly also during this extraordinary situation.

And as we are all saying these days in Italy, we’re very sure that

**ANDRÀ  
TUTTO  
BENE!**

*(everything will be OK!) ●*





## “Have you eaten your rice today?”

This question is a typical Chinese greeting instead of “Hello” or “How are you?” The counterpart is expected to always reply with a “Yes”. Rice is the oldest known food that is still widely consumed today. So it is worth taking a closer look at where it comes from, how it is grown and what it can do for you.

For half the world’s population, rice represents food and life. The cereal grain is considered a gift of God and charged with symbolic connotations. For example, rice was traditionally thrown at weddings because it is a symbol of life and fertility. So, of course, various myths surround the origins of this staple food. According to one legend, Retna Dumila, an Indian girl wooed by Shiva, confronted the god with a challenge to win her heart. He should find a dish that anyone could eat at any time without ever feeling unwilling to do so. During the god’s futile search, the girl died. On her grave then grew a plant that conquered the world with its tasty grains.

There is some evidence that rice has been grown in Asia for 5 - 6,000 years or longer. It was spread through Asia and then introduced to Europe. This route illustrates its importance in Asian countries. It is no wonder that it has found its way into the language, too. For example, at the beginning of the New Year, people in China do not say “Happy New Year!” but “May your rice never burn!” Also, in Japan, people did not think in terms of breakfast, lunch and dinner, but rather morning rice (asa gohan), afternoon rice (hiru gohan) and evening rice (ban gohan).

### Rice production and harvesting

Asia has more than 200 million rice farms, most of them small ones with less than one hectare of land. For millions of Asians living in rural areas, rice-based farming is the main economic activity. One of the best-known cultivation areas are the Banaue Rice Terraces in the Philippines, commonly referred to as the “Eighth Wonder of the World”. These 2,000-year-old terraces were carved into the mountains of Ifugao by ancestors of the indigenous people. However, rice can be grown practically anywhere, yet the growing methods differ significantly in different localities.

In most Asian countries, the traditional hand methods of cultivating and harvesting rice are still practiced, though. Its cultivation takes several steps. First, the seedlings are started in seedling beds. Meanwhile, the fields are prepared. After they have been plowed, fertilized, smoothed and then flooded – either by rain or river water –, the 30-50 days old rice plants are transported by hand to the fields. Rice fields need constant irrigation, which is why they are built in artificial swamps. During the growing season, the fields are kept well-watered by canals or hand watering. After 105 to 150 days, the grains can be ►



harvested, including cutting and threshing the plants. A single seed of rice will result in over 3,000 grains.

Apart from transplanting, the second main practice of establishing rice plants is direct seeding. It requires less labour and can be done manually or by machine. Dry or pre-germinated seeds are spread on dry or irrigated soil and then incorporated. Due to increasing labour costs, this method is mostly used in Latin-America, for example.

The harvesting can also be done manually or mechanically. Again, the labour-intensive manual harvesting is common across most of Asia. Mechanical harvesting is less common because the machinery is expensive and often difficult to obtain.

Although Asia alone produces and consumes roughly 90 percent of the world's rice, many

countries know a long-standing tradition of rice cultivation. In Africa, where it has been cultivated for about 3,500 years, rice is the fastest-growing staple food. Nevertheless, during the last 40-50 years, rice consumption has grown even faster. The demand in Africa has outgrown the regional rice supply, making increasing imports necessary. With women going off to work and men working at greater distances from home, people eat more rice than ever before. It is quickly prepared and has thus become a major foodstuff. In many West-African areas, rice is cultivated predominantly by women farmers who have made it an essential part of their income.

#### A huge diversity of varieties

The Greek called rice oryza, the Romans arisa, which then became risotto in Italian. It is harvested from the *Oryza sativa* plant (Asian rice) or the *Oryza glaberrima* (African rice). Rice is said to be cultivated in more than 40,000 va-



rieties, the exact figure being uncertain. They are divided into two main groups, long-grain-rice (Indica) and medium- and short- or round-grain rice (Japonica). Long-grain rice works well in such dishes as pilaf, stir-fry, salad, soup and the like, as the cooked grains are lighter, fluffier and more separated than medium- or short-grain rice. The medium grains tend to cling together, the round grains are soft and chewy when cooked. This makes them a good choice for dishes with a creamier consistency, such as risotto or rice pudding, as well as sushi and other Asian dishes.

#### Here are at least some of the most widely known types from the Indica group:

**Basmati Rice**, originally from India, is very aromatic and spreads its delightful fragrance during preparation. It got its name from this characteristic, as basamati means scent.

**Jasmine (or Thai Fragrant) Rice** smells very appetising, too. As the grains are not as long as the Basmati rice, they are stickier when cooked.

**Patna Rice**, originally from the Indian peninsula, is the most widely known long grain rice.

**Calasparra** and **Bomba Rice** belong to the Indica group despite their short grains. Both can absorb a lot of liquid and remain distinct and un-sticky when fully cooked, due to their relatively low amylopectin content. This is why they are recommended for paella recipes.

#### You will also know some basic grades from the Japonica group:

**Sticky/glutinous rice** sticks together after cooking due to its high starch content (called amylopectin). It is ideal for eating with chopsticks and is primarily used in Asian cuisines, both in sweet dishes and as a side dish.

**Arborio** (with a characteristic white dot at the center of the grain) and Carnaroli are short-grain rice varieties grown in Italy. They develop a creamy texture and are therefore primarily used in risotto.

**Sushi Rice** with its oval form is especially used for sushi, the name says it all. Its stickiness holds the typical sushi shape together. It is often mixed with a specific vinegar marinade to obtain that typical sushi rice taste.

**Red Rice**, medium-grain rice originally from India, is unpolished with honey-red bran. It is ▶



grown in the Camargue region as organic rice. Cooked grains have a savoury, nutty flavour.

**Black Rice**, raw too, has, of course, dark black bran. When cooked, it is slightly chewy with a subtle sweet spiciness.

### High in nutritional values

The nutrient value of rice depends on the variety and cooking method. Nutrients provided by rice include carbohydrate, B vitamins, iron, zinc, magnesium and other components such as fibre. Rice is naturally gluten-free, does not have sodium or cholesterol and barely any fat. The health benefits of rice include its ability to

provide fast and instant energy, regulate and improve bowel movements, help weight loss efforts and stabilise blood sugar levels. It also provides an essential source of vitamin B1 to the human body. Containing many essential nutrients, it should be part of a balanced diet. The metabolism, digestion, blood pressure and the immune system can also benefit from rice intake. Rice also has minerals and antioxidants that keep the skin soft and smooth and can slow down the aging process.

Rice and rice products can contain carcinogenic inorganic arsenic, though. This chemical element is inherent in the earth's crust. It leaks



into the environment through phosphate fertiliser and sludge. It thus gets into food and potable water via the groundwater. As the rice fields are submerged in water, the plant absorbs particularly much arsenic via the roots.

Although arsenic in rice cannot be avoided entirely, there is no reason to shun it altogether. First, it is essential to know that the element settles in the outer layers of the grain. Consequently, husked rice contains less arsenic than brown rice. Second, the rice should be thoroughly washed and then cooked with a lot of water. Thereby, arsenic dissolves and can be poured off with the surplus cooking water. This method also reduces the potassium load, as potassium is water-soluble, so you kill two birds with one stone. Rice is an extremely versatile staple food and offers savoury meals as a main ingredient or side dish. Due to its broad range of varieties and consistencies, it adapts well to any meal, allowing endless tasty combinations. It is no wonder that it is so popular worldwide and has found its way into many recipes known as typical for a specific country. On the following pages, you find two one-pot dishes ideal for the wintertime. ●

### DID YOU KNOW?

- For the Great Wall of China, sticky rice was used to hold the wall's stones together.
- What car do you drive? Honda means "main rice field", Toyota means "bountiful rice field".
- The Japanese rice wine Sake is made by fermenting rice that has been polished to remove the bran.
- Rice is grown on every continent on earth, except in Antarctica.
- Some jewellery designers write a person's name on a grain of rice. It is worn as a pendant in a small glass vial as a personalised piece of jewellery.
- Botanically, wild rice is not rice at all. It is a type of commercial rice or Zizania.
- If stored properly, uncooked white rice can remain fresh and edible for 10 – 30 years.





## One-pot chicken and rice

After a journey into the world of rice it is now time for practice. Two recipes with two different types of rice bring that world into your kitchen. Different flavours and different consistencies included. Try out this delicious One-pot for yourself!



Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 3 tbsp rapeseed oil
- 320 g chicken breast fillet, cut into chunks
- 1 small onion (70 g), finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 red pepper (150 g), cut in small chunks
- 240 g long grain rice
- 400 ml of vegetable broth
- Fresh parsley for topping



### Preparation

Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add chicken breast and cook until browned, stirring often. First add onions and garlic, let them fry until translucent, then add the red pepper and cook for 30 seconds more. Stir in rice and chicken broth. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cover. Cook for 15 - 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. If necessary, add more water or broth. Remove pot from heat, place fresh parsley on top of the rice and serve.

**Tip:** Use spices like chilli flakes, curry powder, ginger or curcuma according to taste! ●

### Nutritional values per serving:

Energy	441 kcal
Protein	22 mg
Carbohydrates	55,7 g
Fat	15 g
Sodium	197 mg
Phosphorus	239 mg
Potassium	500 mg
Liquid	211 mg
Calcium	43,9 mg



**TIP:** For this one-pot chicken and rice recipe you can follow your personal preference and use either long-grain, Basmati or Jasmine rice.



## Beetroot risotto with parmesan and walnuts

Here is a second rice dish to put your new knowledge about rice into practice. A nourishing, creamy risotto always makes a wonderful meal for the autumn and wintertime. This beetroot risotto combines the specific earthy flavour with its stunning red colour. Try it out for yourself!



Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 1 small onion (70 g)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 240 g risotto rice
- 125 ml white wine
- 250 ml vegetable broth
- 150 g beetroot, pre-cooked
- 80 g butter, cold
- 100 g parmesan, grated
- 60 g walnuts, chopped



### Preparation

Finely dice the onions and sauté in olive oil. Add the dry rice and cook until translucent. Deglaze with wine, and wait until liquid is nearly absorbed, stirring constantly. Then add the first ladle of warm vegetable broth. Let the liquid evaporate before adding the next one. Finely chop the pre-cooked beetroot and add to the rice after 15 minutes. When the rice is al dente, reduce the heat. Stir the cold butter and then the grated parmesan into the risotto. Sprinkle each serving with 1 tablespoon of chopped walnuts.

**Tip:** Also tastes good with horseradish. Serve the beetroot risotto with a tablespoon of horseradish sauce on top instead of walnuts. ●

### Nutritional values per serving:

Energy	497 kcal
Protein	11,6 mg
Carbohydrates	55,3 g
Fat	24 g
Sodium	225 mg
Phosphorus	260 mg
Potassium	277 mg
Liquid	151 mg
Calcium	208 mg



**TIP:** This risotto makes a delicious vegetarian main dish, but you can also serve it as a side dish with almost any meat, from chicken to fish and beef.



## Gifts from the heart

Children are so very proud when they can present their first self-made gifts. Grown-ups have often lost that joy. When did that happen? Let us return to our younger days' habits and give the most precious gifts of all: those of our time, our thoughts and our love.

When the temperatures drop and the world seems to move slower, when people are drawn indoors to a hot cup of tea or a cosy fire, the world somehow seems to make room for the holiday season. People like to adorn their homes with seasonal decorations and scented candles. As we all have more time on our hands during the winter months, here are a couple of suggestions to while away the time with homemade decorations and presents.

The idea behind it goes further than giving something personal. Everybody has leftovers at home, things nobody needs any longer. Before throwing them away, the concept of upcycling is becoming more and more attractive. Instead of throwing fabric remnants, single buttons, knitting yarn, pieces of coloured paper away, put them to an alternative use!

### Anticipating Christmas

The selection of do-it-yourself tutorials has to do with festive decoration meant to bring the Christmas spirit to your homes – from candles and candle holders to tree ornaments. Let's start with a homemade Advent calendar. An Advent calendar counts down the time until Christmas Eve, from the First of Decem-

ber to 24th December. The tradition of anticipating Christmas by opening one window every day is of German origin. The first calendar, made by handwork, can be traced back to 1851. From the late 1950s, calendars filled with chocolate began to appear. Around that time, they also began to spread around the world. US-President Eisenhower has been photographed while opening the windows with his grandchildren. Today, the calendars are a global phenomenon, even seeing a boost in popularity in recent years.

Advent calendars have known many variations. Virtual calendars offer funny gimmicks on the internet, city hall buildings illuminate 24 of their windows. A unique variation is the living calendar, where people meet every day in Advent in front of a different "window" – a building or a square – which has been festively decorated. At the respective station, the participants sing songs, tell Christmas stories and offer culinary delights.

The next pages give you some ideas for do-it-yourself Christmas decorations. Have fun doing some handicrafts and enjoy the festive mood created by having them around. ●

## A VERY PERSONAL ADVENT CALENDAR

Though usually made of cardboard showing nativity scenes or winter motives, here is an illustrated instruction to make one yourself. A homemade calendar is a very personal gift to give to our children, family or friends. You can fill the bags with whatever you – or the person it is intended for – like, chocolate, little gifts, meaningful quotations or handwritten poems, vouchers, photographs... There are no limits.



You need 24 small paper bags, glue, decorative material, a thin string to attach the bags, one thick string or a dry branch to hang the bags on. You can also use stickers or stamps with Christmas motives.



Decorate the bags in any way you like, with stars, glittering snowflakes, little drawings. Remember to put a number from 1 to 24 on every one of the bags.



## FESTIVELY DECORATED CANDLE

This candle adds a festive touch to any living room and spreads a pleasant cinnamon scent.



You need a pillar candle (white), 20-25 cinnamon sticks, a decorative band, various little decorative objects and glue. A hot glue gun is the most accurate way to apply the adhesive.



Measure a piece of the decorative band around the candle. Fix it with glue.



Apply the glue in small dots alongside the cinnamon sticks. Press the adhesive side of the stick several seconds to the candle. Proceed until the candle is fully covered.



Apply little objects like mini cones, star anise or dried orange slices. Glue them to the decorative band where the ends meet.

## TEXTURED DECORATION FOR THE CHRISTMAS TREE

These embossed clay stars are easy to make and give an individual touch to your Christmas tree or Advent arrangement.



You need a block of air-hardening modelling clay, preferably white (can be ordered online), a rolling pin, patterned rubber stamps or paper doilies, pine needles or anything else you want to use to make an impression in the clay, cookie cutters in any form (star, flower, heart), decorative ribbons and possibly sandpaper.

Roll out the air-drying clay evenly to about 5mm thick. The thicker the clay, the longer it takes to dry! Press the rubber stamps evenly into the clay. If you are working with a paper doily or other flat items, use the rolling pin to firmly press the material into the clay. Make sure to apply even pressure.



Cut out the clay shapes with your cookie cutters. Put a hole in every piece's tip by using a straw or pen, but don't place it too close to the edge of your shape. The clay needs to be thick enough not to break when you attach the ribbon.

Leave the items to dry for 24-48 hours. Should they curl during the drying process, simply turn them over. Finally, thread a sufficiently long ribbon through the hole and tie a knot to hang. Sand away any rough edges with fine sandpaper to get a smooth finish.



## FRAGRANT ORANGE CANDLEHOLDER

These colourful seasonal candleholders look very pretty on your dining table or the window sill. And they scent your rooms deliciously.



You need 1-3 oranges, 1-3 tea lights, cloves, a knife, a spoon, a pen (for marking your pattern), various little decorative objects (if desired) and glue.



How do you want your oranges to look like? Choose your own pattern – for example, curved lines, stars or a heart – and mark the fruits beforehand with little dots.



Trace the form of a tea light on the orange. Cut around the form and spoon it out as deep as needed.



Stick the cloves side by side into the orange along your marked lines.



Put the tea light into the created cavity.



You can decorate the oranges with star anise, mini cones or anything you have at hand.



## Brain calisthenics

Stretch your mind with these challenging brain teasers. Whether you do them in a group or with others, remember the most important part: **having fun!**



## SUDOKU

When completing the fields, the numbers from 1 to 9 may be entered only once in each unit, that is, in each row, column and block.

### Easy

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3			6	9				1
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	6			7			8	

### Moderate

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				3				
	7		9		3		1	
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## How to get through a cold winter without a winter cold

When it is cold outside, the immune system has to work overtime. The winter months have always been flu season. Consequently, people are not only more prone to catching a cold, they also get infected with the flu or, newly, Covid-19 more easily.

Especially with this new virus in view, staying healthy is crucial.

A couple of measures can help you prevent catching a chill, a virus or any kind of respiratory ailment. Here's to your health!

When the air is cold and dry, the influenza virus literally jumps from person to person. Studies have shown that transmission rates are highest when temperature and humidity are both low. Even when we turn the heat on to make our homes cosy, the air stays dry unless we employ a humidifier. The same applies to the Covid-19 virus. It is suspected that temperature and humidity in the environment also affect the severity of Covid-19 symptoms. The findings of researchers from Europe and China indicate that the disease is more severe in colder months than warmer ones, and that dry indoor air may encourage the spread of the disease.

Patients with a primary chronic disease such as CKD are rated as high-risk patients and should keep a very close eye on staying healthy. On top of that, sneezing and coughing in public is more frowned upon in times of Covid-19 than ever before. Scientists are just beginning to collect findings about the new virus. As we do not know anything about a co-infection with the flu and Covid-19, we have to stick to the common preventive measures. Rest assured, there are a bunch of effective steps you can adopt to keep well this winter.

### Symptoms of a cold

- a sore throat
- sneezing
- running nose
- mild fever
- Mild headache, often due to congested sinuses
- Sometimes a cough.

### Symptoms of the flu

- usually high fever (38–40 degrees Celsius)
- shivering
- muscle aches
- enfeebling fatigue
- (possibly severe) headache
- dry cough that may become moist

### Covid-19 symptoms

- a cough
- a high temperature (at least 38°C)
- shortness of breath
- a sore throat
- sneezing, a runny nose
- temporary loss of smell.
- diarrhoea

### Boost your immune system

There are several key factors to keeping your immune system strong:

- **Be active:** Frequently take a walk, breathing in the fresh air. Keep warm, though, because low body temperatures also impair the immune system's capacity to fight unwanted germs!
- **Eat healthy food:** For example, herbs and vegetables contain vitamin C, which is actively involved in the defence against viruses and bacteria. Make sure you get enough of it, through food or via supplements.
- **Get plenty of rest:** Lack of sleep weakens the immune system's ability to identify and kill infected cells. So, assist your defences by regularly getting a good night's sleep.
- **Stay warm:** Heat your home to at least 18°C. Feeling chilly facilitates catching a chill. If possible, use a humidifier.

### Smile often

Yoko Ono recommended: "Smile in the mirror. Do that every morning and you'll start to see a big difference in your life." A smile not only does you and your surroundings good, it is indeed a boost for your natural defences. The more cheerful you are, the easier the work is for your immune system. A smile is indeed a boost for your natural defences. For some, that is easier said than done, especially when the days are grey and dull. So, how do you put yourself in a good mood when you don't feel it? In that case, you could ask yourself: Who is the boss? What you think determines what you feel. And who decides what you think? You have the power to choose how you want to feel because you can control your



thoughts. Being aware of this is one important factor to influence your mood. As Marcus Aurelius said: "The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts."

The feeling of gratitude is powerful, too, and it is so easy to create. No matter what mood you are in, if you recall what you could be thankful for, your mood will spontaneously brighten and improve. You could also do something that will put you in high spirits instantly. Watch a funny movie or comedy clip, listen to your personal good-mood music playlist or CD, read a couple of jokes or a humorous story. Meet with friends or ▶



remember a wonderful event or your last holiday. What amuses you? Put together your own favourite list of strategies. That will surely put a smile on your face.

### Follow the hygiene recommendations

While more and more assured facts about Covid-19 become known, the population in general and medical staff, in particular, learn about the pandemic while going through the process. For your wellbeing and that of others, you should follow some preventive measures:

- Wash your hands with soap for 20-30 seconds and dry them well.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes, best with your elbow.
- Avoid touching your face with unclean hands.
- Don't share personal items such as cups, food utensils or towels.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces often, like doorknobs.
- Stay home if you are sick and avoid close contact with others.
- Keep coughs away from other people.
- Wear a face mask.

Frequent – and long enough – hand washing is much more effective in warding off pesky germs than using a disinfectant on your skin all the time. Hum the 'Happy Birthday' song under your breath twice in a row while washing your hands. That roughly fills the recommended timeframe. All the better if it also puts a smile on your face.

### A runny nose could be just that

A common cold can easily be cured at home. Even though you may feel tired or have aches, most symptoms are above the neck. Muscle

pain is uncommon for a cold. You may feel it coming over a couple of days, while the onset of flu symptoms is rather sudden. The flu makes bed rest necessary, as patients are usually bone-tired.

Covid-19 symptoms are similar to several other respiratory illnesses that are much more common, such as colds or the flu. These symptoms do not necessarily mean you have Covid-19. Make sure you get tested nonetheless.

If you are unsure whether you need to be tested, call your GP or contact person on the NephroCare team.

Whether it is the flu or just a cold, if you show any symptoms, avoid spreading bugs. The hygiene measures stated above apply even more strictly. Stay at home and wear a face mask if you have to come near other people. The illness is spread by droplets. Without a mask, the droplets spray out and may reach other people and surfaces. A face mask helps stop droplets spreading when someone speaks, laughs, coughs or sneezes.

Influenza or even a severe cold could affect your overall health. That is why the winter months with low temperatures and dry air represent a challenge for many. By complying with a small set of essential precaution measures, you have no reason not to enjoy this beautiful time of year. Your body will thank you for this inner stance. Stay healthy and enjoy the winter! ●

### References

Kifer, D., et al.: "Effects of environmental factors on severity and mortality of COVID-19", *MedRxiv* 07/2020 (preprint), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.07.11.20147157>.

Jopp, Andreas. *Risikofaktor Vitaminmangel (Vitamins. Life's hidden miracle.)*, Stuttgart (TRIAS) 2017.

### A side note on vaccination:

Patients with a primary disease like CKD are recommended to get the flu vaccine each year. Even though a serum against Covid-19 has not yet been developed, the regular flu vaccine remains a vital protective measure, especially for high-risk and elderly people.

As a risk reduction is extremely important, you should consult with your treating physician about vaccination against influenza for several reasons:

- Less chance of simultaneous infection
- Less chance of acquiring influenza
- Lower risk of being hospitalised on Covid-19 suspicion.





## Let's celebrate – it's wintertime

„It's the most wonderful time of the year“, Andy Williams has been singing for decades every year around Christmas, „it's the happiest season of all“. The month of December is one long string of celebrations all around the world that last well into January – from merry festivities to unique traditions and mystical events.

During the winter months, one of the most important feasts is Christmas, of course. The traditions to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ vary a lot, though. Many families decorate their homes and a tree with bright lights, candles, holly, mistletoe and ornaments. In many [European countries](#), children are told that the Christ Child brings them presents the night before Christmas. Santa Claus is said to come from the North Pole in a sleigh to deliver gifts in the [United States](#), while he is be-



How exciting when Santa Claus opens his sack full of presents.

lieved to arrive by boat in [Hawaii](#), on water skis in [Australia](#), and in [Ghana](#) he comes out of the jungle.

These examples show that Christmas isn't the same all over the world. Coptic Christmas is not only celebrated differently but on a different day altogether. Copts prepare special dishes, go to mass and play Nativity scenes showing the baby Jesus born in a cave, not a manger. Baba Noel – or Father Christmas – leaves sweet pastries called kahk. Though mainly associated with [Egypt](#), it is celebrated by Coptic Christians in [Ethiopia](#), [Ukraine](#), [Russia](#) and other places. The date around 7th January follows the Julian (Orthodox) calendar and, therefore, also called Orthodox Christmas. Coptic and Orthodox traditions differ but are celebrated on the same day.

A widely known feast around the same time is Hanukkah, celebrated by [Jewish people](#) for eight days each November or December. According to legend, one day's worth of oil burned for eight days in the temple. The Jews remember this ancient miracle every year with prayer, special food and the lighting of the Hanukkah. This eight-armed candelabrum bears one candle for every night of the festivities. ►



The special chandelier holds the eight candles for every Hanukkah night and a ninth candle called "helper" or "servant" used to light all other candles.



*On St. Lucia Day, young women gather in a procession lighting the way through the darkness of winter.*

The Kwanzaa tradition is based on ancient African harvest festivals and celebrated by [African-Americans in the United States](#) from 26th December to the First of January. During this holiday that commemorates African heritage, families and friends gather to exchange gifts and celebrate the seven fundamental values of African-American family life: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. To symbolize these values, people light a series of black, red and green candles.

### Celebrating around the world

A lot of beautiful festivals happen throughout the winter months. Especially the winter solstice, celebrating the longest night – or the shortest day – has known a lot of ancient traditions that have merged into popular festivals during the holiday season.

[Scandinavia](#) knows St. Lucia Day on 13th December, which marked the old calendar's winter solstice. Norse pagan customs to fight the long dark winters and Christian rites in honour of the martyr Saint Lucy of Syracuse merge and make this holiday one of the Scandinavian calendar highlights. It is a stunning spectacle to watch girls dress up as "Lucia brides" in long white gowns with a red sash, wearing a wreath of burning candles on their heads. They gather in outdoor processions singing traditional songs and carrying food.

Vast quantities of candles are also implicated in the Day of the Little Candles in [Colombia](#). On the Seventh of December, the Día de las Velitas initiates the Christmas season celebrating the Virgin Mary on the eve of the Immaculate Conception Feast. Tiny lights illuminate buildings and houses across the country while paper lanterns and electric lights light up the night. Friends and families get together and admire their illuminations.



*Malanka calls for enormous costumes.*

The first day of the year, New Year's Day, is welcomed at midnight with fireworks in many countries worldwide. Various traditions and symbols aim at ensuring good fortune and wealth for the new year. The [Chinese](#) New Year, falling on different dates between 21st January and 20th February each year, is the most important Chinese holiday. The celebration with traditional dances, fireworks and parades lasts for about 15 days.

Following the Orthodox calendar, the [Ukraine's](#) New Year celebration falls in mid-January and is called Malanka. People wear masks or costumes that are often modelled after bears, goats or even devils that may remind Western Europeans of the Mardi Gras tradition. Singing and dancing through the town, they let loose on practical jokes and rowdy humour.

### Celebrating some droll traditions

In many corners of the world, people developed some rather funny or odd rituals. For example, on Christmas day, [Czech](#) unmarried women throw a shoe at their house – the decisive factor being how the shoe lands. If the heel faces the house, the woman must expect to be single throughout the next year. In Zurich in [Switzerland](#), the end of winter is celebrated with the Sechseläuten, ringing the bells at six p. m. This tradition goes back to the 16th century when Council of the Zurich guilds decreed to schedule end of work one hour later in the summer months, with the bells ringing at six o'clock. A massive artificial snowman called Böögg is filled with wood wool and firecrackers and burnt atop a 30-foot-tall pyre. The sooner the Böögg explodes, so they say, the sooner summer will come.

The Norwegians believe that witches and other spirits mischievously stole brooms from households to ride on Christmas Eve. That is why people in [Norway](#) hide their brooms before going to bed that night. A Celtic holiday known as Imbolc celebrates its annual ritual on The Hill of the Witch in Ireland. On the hill, a 5,000-year-old sacred burial complex is situated where a beam of the rising sun penetrates the inner chamber and illuminates a white rock within the complex. As this happens in between the solstice and the equinox, the event is said to forecast the winter duration. According to the legend, a witch appears on the hillside to gather firewood. The winter will drag on depending on the quantity of wood she needs.

All these different traditions and the nuances in telling the legends make our world so colourful. Wherever you go, join in the festivities as part of a people's cultural heritage. ●



*The Swiss send off the winter by burning a Böögg.*

## Brain calisthenics solutions

### SUDOKU

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