

Winterize Your Body to Stay Healthy



During the winter months, people will take steps to winterize their homes and vehicles. They shut off outside water to keep pipes from freezing and may put snow tires on their car if they live in areas with heavy snowfall. They may also winterize their wardrobe, putting on heavier clothes when they venture outdoors.

Most of us don't think about winterizing our bodies, primarily because indoor heating and cooling tend to reduce the impact of seasonal weather, but perhaps we should. In different seasons of the year, people are more prone to specific health problems, for instance, allergies in the spring, heat stroke in the summer, and colds and flu in the winter.

Most people know that wintertime is the cold and flu season, a time when we are more susceptible to viral infections, sore throats, and pneumonia, but it's not just infectious disease that increases during winter months. People are also more prone to itchy skin, joint pain, and depression during the winter. People with asthma are more prone to asthma attacks, too. Even heart attacks, the leading cause of death in Western society, are more likely to happen in the winter months.

Why is this the case and what can we do about it? Those are the questions we'll try to answer in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*. We'll introduce the topic of seasonal changes by discussing how the body changes to adapt to the heat of summer and the cold of winter. We'll show why we're more prone to certain diseases in winter and discuss how we can boost wintertime health with diet, supplements, and appropriate lifestyle changes.

Traditional Wisdom and the Cycles of Nature



Traditional systems of medicine understood cycles of nature and took factors like climate and the seasonal availability of herbs and foods into account. We'll borrow from this traditional wisdom and some modern science to focus on the differences in the body during the summer and winter.

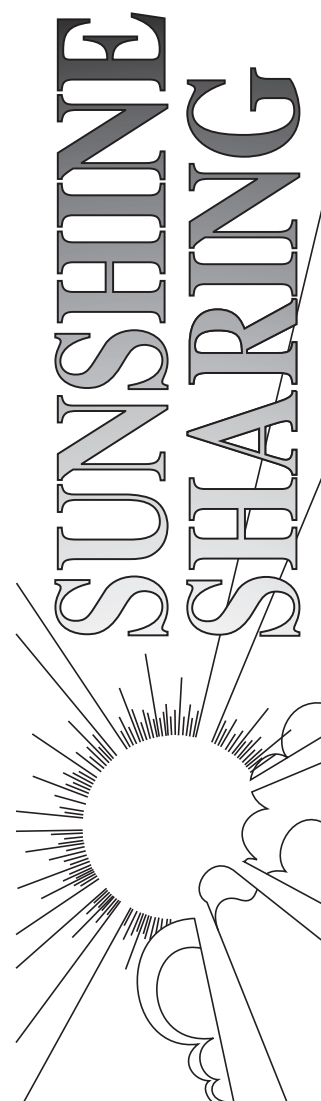
The body is an energy-generating machine and produces excessive heat as a by-product of energy generation. During the summer, when it is warm, this heat must be dissipated to keep the body from overheating. Circulation to the periphery of the body is opened up as are the sweat glands, which allows heat to be more readily discharged by moisture evaporating off the skin as sweat.

People tend to be more physically active in summer, so they can burn carbohydrates faster, too. This allows people to thrive on less calorie-dense foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables. The antioxidants in the fruits and vegetables that are readily available during this time of year also reduce heat generation by cooling oxidative reactions.

Wintertime Changes

During the winter, the circulation pulls inward to conserve heat, which means less blood flows to the extremities. Instead of being open, the skin pores tend to be closed. The skin also becomes more oily to help hold heat and moisture in the body. Because the body needs

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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to generate more heat to stay warm, it needs more calorie-dense foods to generate heat.

During winter, less fresh food is available. Thus, less vitamin C-rich food is available, lowering intake of this nutrient. Vitamin D levels, which are affected by exposure to sunlight, also decline, due to the shorter days and longer nights of winter, coupled with the tendency to stay indoors. Lack of these nutrients may be a major factor in creating the cold and flu season because both are critical nutrients for a healthy immune system.

In addition to the lack of sunlight, staying indoors more when it is cold also makes it easier for infections to spread. It also allows more accumulation of toxins in the indoor air from outgassing of paint and other building materials, as well as a tendency for dust, pet hair, and other irritants to accumulate. This is compounded by the fact that we want to keep everything tightly shut to conserve our heating bills and generally don't air out our homes by opening windows and doors like we do in the spring and summer months. All these factors play a role in making us more prone to infectious diseases, particularly those involving the respiratory system.

Winter and Respiratory Problems

Because moisture freezes in cold temperatures, and because indoor heating tends to dry the air, there is often a lack of moisture in the air in wintertime. In fact, indoor relative humidity can fall down as low as one percent. Dry air will more rapidly dry out the mucus on the membranes of the lungs and sinuses.



In addition, cold air tends to cause the bronchioles to contract to protect the lungs. Cold, dry air can also trigger the release of histamine, which constricts the air passages contributing to increased problems for people with asthma, reactive airway disease, and COPD.

Other Wintertime Changes

The reduced exposure to light also affects the mind via the pineal gland. Light entering the eyes is important in regulating mood. A condition known as cabin fever has been noted in people who live in far northern climates where the days are very short (perhaps only a few hours long) and the nights are very long. This lack of exposure to sunlight contributes to depression, especially when there is a lack of vitamin D.

Reduced activity level, coupled with the inward flow of blood, can cause less oxygen to reach the extremities of the body. This can aggravate joint and muscle pain. So, less activity and blood flow will make arthritis symptoms worse. Reduced activity and holiday treats can also lead to excess weight gain.

These are examples of how the seasonal changes brought on by winter can increase susceptibility to various ailments. So, what can we do to compensate for these changes? That's what we'll look at next.

Diet, Climate and Seasons

There is no one perfect diet for all climates and seasons. The body has different needs in different weather conditions. Contrast the diets of people who live in countries close to the equator (such as Mexico and Central America, the Middle East, and India) with the diets of the natives of Alaska and Northern Canada, the Scandinavian Countries, and Siberia.

People who live closer to the equator don't need to eat as much animal protein or fat to stay healthy. That's why many people in India stay healthy on a vegetarian diet. They thrive on diets of abundant fruits and vegetables, dairy products, eggs, grains, and legumes. They also tend to eat more spicy foods, because spices increase peripheral circulation, encouraging sweating.

In contrast, people in the colder climates eat more meat and animal fat. Long winters don't provide much else to eat. So, traditional diets consisted of fatty animal meat (including organ meats), smoked fatty fish (like salmon), and a few dried herbs and berries.

Dr. Weston Price, while studying the diets of indigenous people of Northern Canada learned how they obtained adequate vitamins C, A and D in winter. For vitamin C, they ate the raw adrenal glands of animals and for vitamins A and D, they consumed raw liver. People in Siberia and other cold climates also gathered rose hips, pine nettles, and other dried fruits and berries to make tea (or compote) to drink during winter, a practice which also supplemented their vitamin C intake.

Modern Diets and Seasonal Changes

Without modern methods of food preservation, storage, and shipping, we'd be forced to do what native people have always done. Diets would change with the seasons, based on what mother nature put on the table or allowed us to preserve for the winter. In contrast, many modern diets vary little throughout the year.

Just because you can get summer foods like tomatoes, cucumbers, strawberries, and lettuce year-round doesn't mean that you should eat them year-round. These foods tend to be cooling, not warming, in their effect on the body.

Of course, if you're mostly staying indoors this is probably alright, because you're making your climate the same all year long. However, if you're outdoors a lot in winter (or don't crank up the heat because of rising energy costs) it is a good idea to alter your diet to compensate for the cold.

Dietary Changes for Winter

When it's cold, the body needs calorie dense foods to generate heat. In particular, the body needs more fat and starch. Fatty foods help thicken the blood, create a more oily skin to preserve heat, and generate more heat to keep the body warm. So, it's not only all right to eat more animal fats and proteins in cold weather, it's actually an appropriate choice provided you're getting high quality organic and/or pasture-raised animal proteins.

It's also a good idea to avoid out of season foods that are only available because of greenhouses and shipping. These summer-time foods tend to cool metabolism in winter when a hotter metabolism is desired. They also don't have the nutrition they should because they lose nutritional value while being shipped long distances.

Winter is a good time for eating root vegetables (like potatoes, carrots, onions, parsnips, turnips, and beets), and the more starchy fruits (apples and pears) and dried fruits (apricots, raisins, and prunes). Most of these foods mature in the fall and were traditionally preserved in a root cellar. Also, when fruits are dried, they are less cooling and more nutritionally dense.

Wintertime Supplements

In addition to changing your diet for winter, it's also smart to supplement with extra vitamins. Start with a good vitamin A and D supplement (like a traditional fish liver oil supplement) and/or vitamin D3 along with some vitamin K2. The farther north you live, the more important this is. Most people, need a minimum of about 400 to 800 IU of vitamin D3 during the winter months to support their health. Taking this will not only help you ward off colds and flu, it will also reduce your risk of heart attacks and depression during the winter months.

You can also take anywhere from 1000 to 5,000 mg of vitamin C, which should include bioflavonoids. It is also preferable to take a vitamin C supplement that has an herbal base of rose hips, acerola cherries, or other natural vitamin C sources so you also get the cofactors you need to utilize the vitamin C.

Because of shipping, you can also get vitamin C from eating oranges and fruits in the winter, but oranges, lemons, mangos, and other fruits from tropical and subtropical climates all tend to have a cooling effect on the body. So don't eat them right before you venture outside.

Caring for Your Lungs in Winter

Breathing cold air, and especially cold, dry air can be damaging to the lungs. Mucus is secreted to move irritants out of the lungs and sinuses. When mucus becomes dry, it stops moving preventing irritants and infectious organisms from being properly flushed away. Dry mucus membranes may also contribute to more frequent nosebleeds.

Many people find that using a humidifier to moisten the indoor air during the winter months helps keep their lungs healthy. Some devices not only diffuse water into the air, they can also be used to diffuse essential oils like pine, fir, eucalyptus, frankincense, and myrrh. These airborne oils not only give a holiday freshness to the home, they reduce the level of airborne pathogens, helping prevent the spread of viruses.

To further reduce the levels of airborne irritants and infectious agents, make sure to change furnace air filters at regular intervals, and dust and vacuum regularly. And, on days when the weather is warmer, open some windows for ten to thirty minutes to allow some fresh air into the house.

Because cold air causes the bronchioles to constrict in order to reduce blood flow and the loss of heat, people with asthma or other chronic respiratory problems need to take extra precautions.



If this applies to you, don't over exert yourself when outdoors in the cold weather. Try to breathe through your nose or even partially cover your nose and mouth to warm the air you're inhaling. This can reduce the risk of asthma attacks, bronchitis, and pneumonia. If you are exercising, it's better to exercise indoors, especially on cold, windy days.



Herbs to Fortify the Lungs

There are herbs that can help your lungs deal with the cold, dry air of winter. One of the best is astragalus. It is widely used in China to prevent lungs from being damaged by cold, dry air. It moistens the lung tissue and fortifies the immune system.

You can take astragalus in capsules, but you'll want a fairly large amount, two or three capsules several times a day. You can also add astragalus to food. For instance, you can put a couple of slices of dried astragalus into a rice cooker while cooking rice. Discard the pieces before serving the rice. You can also add astragalus slices or powder to soups or stews.

If you have chronic lung problems, you may wish to consider a *Chinese Metal-Increasing Formula*. In addition to astragalus, it contains aster root, platycodon, anemarrhena, Asian ginseng, and atractylodes. It also fortifies the lungs and helps boost the immune system.

Herbs to Boost the Immune System

In addition to supplementing with vitamins, you can fortify your immune system, and prevent various viral infections and respiratory problems during the winter, by taking medicinal mushrooms. Many of these mushrooms will grow more prolifically right before a harsh winter, which suggests they help tonify the system for long, cold winters. Try taking a *Mushroom Immune Blend* containing cordyceps, reishi, turkey tail, chaga, shiitake, and agaricus.

You can also take cordyceps by itself. Cordyceps boosts immunity, strengthens the lungs, and helps protect the cardiovascular system, thus helping you avoid many wintertime health problems. Take 4-8 capsules a day.

Wintertime Skin Care

To help conserve heat, skin can be more oily in winter (to conserve heat), but it may also become dry from the dry air. If the skin is either too oily or too dry, it inhibits secretions on the skin, which can aggravate skin problems like acne and eczema. If you get dry skin in winter, make sure you're drinking enough water and getting the good fats your body needs. Also make sure to bathe regularly to keep the skin pores clean.

In many traditional cultures where people lived in far northern climates, people used saunas or sweat lodges during the winter to induce sweating to stay healthy. Sweating was followed by a quick dip in cold water or snow to close the skin pores again. This is also a powerful way to ward off viral infections, especially if you do it in the earliest stages.

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You can accomplish a similar thing by taking spicy herbs, like capsicum, ginger, black pepper, or garlic, about 15-20 minutes prior to taking a hot bath or shower. Afterwards you can take a quick cold shower or sponge bath to close the pores before venturing outdoors again.



You might think that these same spicy herbs will help you stay warm in the winter, but that isn't the case. Because they increase peripheral circulation you'll experience greater heat loss if you need to be outside in cold weather. Most spices grow in hot climates. So, unless you need them to aid poor circulation or to help you fight off a cold or flu, it's best to reduce your intake of spicy food in cold weather.

Wintertime Exercise and Cardiovascular Care

Since cold weather can increase your risk of a heart attack, it's important to take good care of your cardiovascular system during the winter months, especially if you have any pre-existing heart problems.

When you're outside in the cold, it constricts your arteries. Again, this is to reduce blood flow to the extremities to maintain warmth. However, it also means that if you start using your muscles, your heart has to work harder to keep you warm. This means that unless you're used to it, outdoor exercise in cold weather is more stressful to your heart and can increase both heart rate and blood pressure.

So, people who have high blood pressure, heart problems, or diabetes, should be careful when engaging in this kind of outdoor activity. It helps to take frequent breaks to rest, and to go inside and warm up a little if you start to get cold. Remedies that can fortify your cardiovascular system for the winter and reduce your risk of heart problems include hawthorn, rosehips, ginkgo, vitamin D3, vitamin A, and Co-Q10.

Mental and Emotional Health in Winter

People often think of the holiday season, particularly Christmas and New Year, as a festive, happy time. But, since it's also the darkest time of the year, it's also the time when people are most prone to depression.



A problem known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) impacts about five percent of US adults during the winter months. It is sometimes referred to as winter blues or cabin fever. It is associated with a chemical imbalance in the brain that occurs when people are exposed to less daylight. Symptoms may include excessive sadness, a loss of interest in activities, appetite and sleep changes, and difficulty thinking.

If you experience increased depression during the winter months, start by taking vitamin D3. Lower levels of D3 are also associated with depression. Helpful herbal remedies include lemon balm, St. John's wort, and calendula. Increasing your exposure to light by going outdoors during the daylight hours and/or installing full spectrum lighting indoors can also help.

It can also be helpful to take the *Chinese Qi-Lifting Formula* containing perilla, cyperus, typhonium, bitter orange, bamboo sap, ligusticum, and tangerine peel. This blend can not only elevate mood, it also aids digestion and helps improve respiration.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about how to stay healthy during the winter months, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

Staying Healthy with the Seasons by Elson M. Haas, MD

<https://vitalrecord.tamhsc.edu/six-common-winter-health-problems/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-extremely-cold-weather-can-affect-your-health#Less-obvious-effects>