

10 Tips for Winter Health 2023



Even in normal times, it can be difficult to Stay Healthy during the Winter season. This year we have the added challenges of continuing Covid plus a stronger than usual flu season and concerns over RSV in children, so it is more important than ever to take good care of ourselves. We want our bodies and immune system to stay strong to protect and defend us. I hope these tips will help.

The colder and damper climate is often the hardest on our body, along with the shorter days and less sunshine to give us energy and vitality (not to mention vitamin D). So, Staying Healthy in Winter is an Inside Job, with nourishing and warming foods, lots of stretching and indoor exercises, more sleep, stress management and emotional support from the love of family and friends, even if it is via Zoom!

Here are my 10 Winter Tips for you to consider

- 1. Reduce Stress**
- 2. Get Quality Sleep**
- 3. Nourish Yourself**
- 4. Focus on Essential Nutrients**
- 5. Take Time for Reflection**
- 6. Increase Relaxation**
- 7. Avoid Over-indulgence**
- 8. Have Fun and Laugh**
- 9. Make Time for Love**
- 10. Nourish Others**

I have also included my Cold and Flu Buster Tips for extra protection

1. Reduce Stress. This is especially important now as we continue to deal with the consequences of Covid. Stress reduction is a skill you can learn and it will help you conserve your inner resources and slow down unnecessary drains on your energy. Assess the type of stress you are experiencing – is it physical or emotional? Are you feeling stress from your environment, an illness, your work, or relationships? My website has tips to help with your stress management.

2. Get Quality Sleep. Sleep involves both your state-of-mind and body chemistry. If you go to bed feeling stressed or laden with worries, even if you don't normally have insomnia, your sleep may not have the quality it does when your mind is relaxed. On the other hand, I have patients who report that they sleep more deeply and more easily if they supplement with certain nutrients, such as calcium and magnesium melatonin, or 5-hydroxy-tryptophan. If you'd like to learn more about supplements for better sleep check out my blog on Healing Sleep on my website and on my You Tube channel.

3. Nourish Yourself. In this still cold time of winter, provide your body with the extra raw materials it needs. Emphasize warming foods – more concentrated sources of fuel and nutrients, including whole grains and beans, nuts and seeds, seaweed, and quality proteins. In cold or damp weather, you also require a few more calories and spices such as ginger, garlic, and cayenne to heat your body.

4. Focus on Essential Nutrients. Be sure you're getting enough of what your body needs. I also recommend some nutrient enhancement to protect you from the stresses of cold, snow, wind, dampness, and the decrease in sunlight. This is the reason cod liver oil was a staple in healthy families in the 19th century – it contains vitamins A, D, and good fatty acids. The antioxidants are important, especially vitamins A, E, and C. Nutrients that address stress include the B complex vitamins (with B5 and B12), as well as the range of "smart supplements" now available such as alpha lipoic acid, phosphatidyl serine, and others. Make sure you get enough friendly fats and oils – the essential fatty acids you need to operate the nervous system, rebuild and protect your cells, and assure good brain function. Good food sources include avocado, sardines and salmon, plus all the healthy nuts and seeds, such as pumpkin, sesame, and sunflower, plus almonds and walnuts. Remember that these fats do not make us fat – in fact, you're more likely to gain weight if you don't have them, because the lack may increase your food cravings.

5. Take Time for Reflection. The introspective nature of winter provides an excellent opportunity for greater reflection and self-assessment. Take an honest look at where

you are. At the same time, be gentle with yourself. If you are somewhat depleted, you may also feel more vulnerable and more susceptible to illness. Your emotions may be high, or you may be more sensitive than usual. See if you are able to accept yourself more fully in as many areas of your life as possible.

6. Increase the Relaxation in your Life. Learn some relaxation exercises or practice yoga, Tai chi, Qigong, or Pilates exercises. These gentle practices can be done almost anywhere, regardless of the weather and they will be a big help in reducing stress and improving sleep

7. Avoid Over-indulgence. If you feel like you're "running on empty," it makes sense to give yourself a little extra nurturing. But don't confuse self-care with self-indulgence. Continue to minimize sweets and simple starches and avoid the empty calories of junk food. Portion sizes may also be a factor. Provide yourself with quality nutrition and supplements rather than constantly jump-starting yourself with caffeine.

8. Have Fun and Laugh. Normally we'd be hanging out with fun-loving and light-hearted friends and loved ones for support during this season, but the response to Covid, colds and flu is limiting these options. So, we have to get creative. Creative projects are a great support. Simple pleasures are stress reducing and healing. Watching movies or funny TV shows is a good stress reducer as well.

9. Make Time for Love. First and foremost during these challenging times, LOVE YOURSELF. If you make that your key attitude, then you'll be able to support your healthiest lifestyle. Still, physical touch and intimacy are also good for your health. Now that only works easily if you're in a close relationship. If you're not in an intimate relationship, connect with friends and family, as your Covid stay-at-home guidelines permit and make time for some close emotional interchanges with a trusted friend or family member, even if it is only by phone or online.

10. Nourish Others. Notice also how relationships nourish you deeply in return. Build giving into your life. Another important aspect of giving is remembering to keep reasonable limits or boundaries, so you don't feel swallowed up or depleted by your generosity. That brings us full circle to the idea of conserving energy during winter, in preparation for the rebirth of Spring. And start your day with Gratitude, and that starts with the idea that "Gratitude is having a Grateful Attitude."

Extra Notes on Colds & Flu

Here's what I do myself if I start to feel sick - it is best to take action immediately.

Vitamin C - I start with hourly vitamin C of 500-1000 mg,

Vitamin A – I take and often suggest increased doses of vitamin A (not beta-carotene) – 25,000-30,000 IUs 3-4 times daily for just 3-4 days and then lower that dosage to 10-25,000 IUs twice daily for about a week. Then take a break since excess vitamin A can be toxic if taken too long in these higher amounts. Although when we are fighting off infections, it doesn't seem to be problematic and these higher amounts help us fight off germs at our mucous membranes.

Garlic - I also use fresh garlic, taking several cloves at a time, dipping them in honey and chewing them. I may repeat this several times for the first day; alternatively, you can press a few cloves into a hot bowl of soup. Garlic is a spicy and aromatic natural antibiotic and immune defender; you could also use the odorless garlic caps, several capsules 3 times daily, if you do not want the smell, but they are not quite as effective.

Echinacea and Goldenseal - an extract (in alcohol) can also be used to support immunity and cleanse the membranes; even the alcohol in them is a disinfectant.

Olive leaf, Oregano Oil or Elderberry extracts – these herbs have some anti-viral properties and can provide some support as well.

Zinc – is an immune supporter and can help with sore throats. A variety of zinc lozenges are available in the stores.

For chest congestion, drink ginger root tea (simmer a few slices of root in a cup or two of water). Also, use some of the hot ginger tea to make a compress and place the soaked cloth over your upper chest. This is warming (which tends to stimulate blood circulation) and helps break up congestion. There are both natural and over-the-counter medicines for colds and coughs.

Hydration - of course, drink lots of water, herbal teas, and hot soup.

Rest - and remember that extra rest helps in healing. Often, we get sick when we are out of balance or overdoing it, so a cold gives us the opportunity to rest and sleep.

And remember, the best advice is:

Stay Healthy!

© Elson Haas MD 2023