

Re:set

Winter Months

WINTER – ARE YOU PREPARED?

This winter, consider winterizing your body to stay fit and healthy, both mentally and physically.

Every year winter comes and every year people act as if the cold, the bouts of sickness, and the winter blues are somehow new and unexpected.

While these tips are helpful for anyone, if you experience extreme mood swings, depression, or lethargy during the winter season that extends beyond, please see your health care provider. Seasonal Affective Disorder is a serious business and affects many people in the same way as a major depressive episode—serious health risks included.

THE PHYSICAL SELF: VITAMINS AND THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Winter days are shorter, fresh food less abundant, and the opportunities for outdoor activities decreased. A significant part of winterizing your body is accounting for the things winter takes away and compensating for them accordingly.

Don't underestimate the power of sunshine. Our circadian rhythm is largely governed by light exposure.

In June there are about 15 hours of sunlight, but in December there are only around 9. Further complicating things, those hours of December daylight are nearly all burned up during the working day, leaving evenings cold and dark.

Knowing that your access to natural light will be restricted, there are a few things you can do to compensate.

TAKE YOUR VITAMINS.

Nordic countries, despite experiencing the same cold and darkness as other northern countries, have a significantly lower rate of Seasonal Affective Disorder. Researchers believe the key is the volume of fish they eat. The enormous reserve of vitamin D and vitamin A found in the fatty tissue of fish protects the Norse from the deficiency experienced by the non-fish eaters in other colder climates. If you want to skip the fish-eating part, consider stopping by your local health food store to pick up fish oil caplets, which could do the trick just as well.

Taking a multivitamin can't hurt given the decrease in fresh fruits and vegetables consumption most people experience in the winter months.

- VITAMIN D

As healthy levels are difficult to achieve through diet alone, experts recommend that everyone consider vitamin D supplements. As our main source of vitamin D is from the sunlight on our skin, it's particularly important to supplement over the winter when exposure to sunlight is limited. Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to a lowered immune system as it directly interacts with the cells that are responsible for fighting infection. Several large observational studies have also shown a link between a deficiency and respiratory tract infections like colds, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

- VITAMIN A

The functions of vitamin A include the formation and maintenance of teeth, bones, soft tissue, white blood cells, the immune system and mucus membranes. Beta-carotene also acts as an antioxidant, protecting cells from free radical damage.

- VITAMIN C & ZINC

For many years Vitamin C has been thought as the number one home remedy for keeping colds at bay. However, research within the last decade has found that taking vitamin C everyday does not reduce a person's risk of getting one, but it does lessen the severity of a cold's symptoms and shorten the duration of the illness. Therefore, getting enough of the vitamin is particularly important during winter when there is a spike in people suffering a cold.

Zinc also has a role in reducing the duration and severity of a cold - taking zinc soon after the onset of symptoms of the common cold can significantly reduce both the duration and severity of symptoms.

- VITAMIN B

The B vitamins are a group of 8 vitamins sometimes called the "anti-stress vitamins" since they're essential for combating the effects of stress. They are used to create the feel-good neurotransmitters responsible for maintaining a positive mood as well as being critical for a healthy nervous system.

The role of vitamin B12, could help us during the colder months as it has been shown to help those suffering from feelings of anxiety or depression. This is important during winter when people are more at risk of feelings of depression, winter blues or Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

It is found almost exclusively in animal protein sources - meat, poultry, seafood, dairy, and eggs - therefore vegans are at risk of deficiency as it's unlikely they will be able to obtain enough through diet alone.

STAY HYDRATED

Hydration is another key element to winterizing your body. People tend to drink a lot of water and fluids in the summer. Winter can be just as dehydrating, however, as the lower humidity dries your skin and the mucus membranes of your nose, throat, and lungs—winter time breathing in many locales is the same as breathing the bone-dry air you experience in an airplane cabin. Be mindful of how much water you drink.

GET OUTSIDE AND STAY ACTIVE

It's easy to get out of the house in the summer—nearly everything fun is happening outside. Between walks in the park, trips to the beach, all the fun events of spring and summer are almost always outside. Try to find some activity that will take you outside and get you active, preferably during a time where you can get some sun on your face. Don't forget how powerful sunshine is and what role it plays in regulating your body's internal clock.

Exercising releases positive endorphins which help you feel good. This also helps you to strengthen the body and boost your immune system to fight against the many common colds around this time of year. Why not try taking part in a class? Being part of a group/team can help with motivation and a sense of worth. Yoga can help with a healthy mindset throughout these tough winter months.

Going to the gym and exercising also gets you out of the house and brings in some social aspects.

Be mindful of your mood and mental health. Winter can increase the incidence of depression and other disorders in many people. Pay close attention to your state of mind in the darker and colder months.

EVALUATE YOUR WINTER PITFALLS TO GUARD AGAINST THEM - SOME QUESTIONS:

1. Brainstorm about winter and what makes it a great, not so great, or wretched season for you. What is your favourite thing about the winter season?
2. What is your least favourite thing about the winter season?
3. How does the decrease in daylight hours make you feel?
4. How do the holidays make you feel? If sad or stressed, why?
5. Do you feel shut in or socially isolated?
6. Do you feel lethargic or like you don't get enough exercise in the winter months?
7. Time to winterise your workouts and health

