



The Vitality of Winter

Sarah Nanclares, Health Coach ND

Do you dread winter? Do you suffer from the winter blues? Well listen up 'cause the very thing you resist will persist.

Leunig once wrote "we give thanks for the blessings of winter: season to cherish the heart, to make warmth and quiet for the heart."

For many years I faced the coming of winter with such dread and melancholia. Dread because of the degree to which I feel the cold and the number of clothes I need to wear. Dread because my home is a draughty icebox and is colder inside than being outside!

And oh! the melancholia. Thinking of the short days and the impact I let that have on my emotions – sadness, boredom, stagnation, slothness and restlessness. Does this sound familiar? Have you ever stopped to consider what you think about the seasons and how autumn, summer, winter and spring make you feel? What does each season mean to you? How does it affect your state of mind? In what way does it change your eating and exercise habits? What are your preferred social activities in winter, summer?

The interaction of the four seasons is the foundation of everything in nature. We can see this clearly amongst our flora and fauna. Winter being hibernation time for animals and plants. Spring being the breeding season and the blossoming of new plant life.

The ancient Chinese believed that the seasons have a profound cyclical effect on our vitality and wellbeing – that our mind and body are influenced by climatic changes in nature. Since on a macro scale humans are part of the holistic system of nature and within us we have a holistic micro system: mind-body-emotion system. So what would happen if we were to align our eating, thinking, mind and behaviours to reflect the seasons? How would doing this create a difference to our wellbeing?

Ancient wisdom suggests that one simple way of developing more harmony within ourselves and our lives is by using nature as a guide. Harmonising with the seasons is second nature to the balanced person. The balanced person experiences greater vitality by eating foods that fortifies their body in a particular season. Their emotions are more even as a result of understanding what thoughts and feelings are amplified in certain seasons. Unfortunately most of us have blunted our instinctual awareness; only through practices that bring us close to the cycles of nature do we begin to hear the voice of our own nature clearly.

In nature, winter is the end of the cycle of seasons. How do we know winter is upon us? As we look around we notice that the trees have lost their leaves. The plants have 'closed down' by not blossoming, we feel the cooler temperatures tantalising our skin. The light of the day is softer, the sun sweeps lower in the sky seemingly huddling closer to the earth, and the days are shorter. We hear the pitter-patter of rain, whooshing of the wind, the silence of the long nights. The more appealing social activities are ones that turn inwards: dining in, watching videos, going to the movies, reading and conversing by an open fire.

To unify with winter for vitality and balance:

1. Winter is a time for turning inwards and becoming more receptive and introspective with our inner world. By sifting through and examining how we are feeling about ourselves and our world around us we can 'quality control' our relationships and become honest about shedding dead wood so that we have more time and energy to channel towards nurturing and growing the relationships that matter. So asking: what is the quality of your relationships in your world? Do you want to maintain them? How can you enhance them?

Unresolved issues, unfinished conversations, dishonoured commitments all leave an open loop for our energy to seep away. To close the loop and recoup your energy sort it out. Commission the courageous part of you to pick up the phone or write that letter.

2. Staying close to the hearth opens up the opportunity to declutter our living space and work space. Clutter does not allow for the free flow of energy, instead the pooled energy that collects around clutter stagnates the energy of your space and blocks the progress of your life. To get you started, pick up each piece of clutter and ask "Have I worn or used this in the last 12 months?" If yes, it can stay. If no, let it go!
3. Whilst there is a 'slowing down' feeling associated with winter, we benefit most from brisk activities, as they are more balancing. Jogging, brisk walks, ball games etc keep our joints supple and circulate the blood.
4. The organs that are most affected by wintertime are the kidneys. The kidneys are related to the ears, which means that the ability to listen clearly is heightened in the cold, quiet months. The sounds of cooking and voices from the kitchen stimulate the appetite. Warm hearty soups, whole grains and roasted nuts sound good on cold days. Lentils, kidney beans, black beans and steamed greens fortify the kidneys in winter.
5. Providing protection and balance for the heart-mind connection is also important and can be achieved with the addition of a few bitter foods since their flavour is said to promote a sinking, centring quality and is

said to 'centre the heart'. Mild, bitter foods include lettuce, watercress, turnip, celery, asparagus, carrot, rye, oats, rocket, and radicchio lettuce. Incorporate some of these foods daily.

6. Harmonise with the stillness of winter by creating the time and space for you to have contemplation time where you do nothing and practice being a human BEING rather than a human DOING. This time out will allow for you to re-group with self, regain balance and focus, get in touch with your creative spirit so that you have the head space to give your life the best of you. All you need is 10mins daily and I encourage you to experiment with gazing out at nature or a sunset or sunrise or even look at a beautiful picture in a magazine or book.

Partner up with a friend and hold each other accountable for practicing two of these principles daily. When spring arrives notice that your mind and emotions are ready for the expansive, creative energy that is its hallmark. Having dedicated time to centring self and tying up loose ends, your mental energy is sharp and dynamic. You will experience greater productivity thanks to the effortless flow of energy in your work and home space. And your body feels vital and robust.

By unifying with the seasons in these simple ways our vibrancy of spirit is maintained and our body maintains its suppleness. It prepares us so that when spring arrives we are ready to welcome in its dynamism and wisdom with outstretched arms.

To learn more about Health Coaching, [please click here.](#)