



# Winter Wellness Guide



## Pick-me-ups for when the mercury drops

by Leisa Harford BHSc (Comp Med), Adv Dip Herb Med



The icy fingers of Jack Frost may soon be leaving their ornamental designs on many a window pane, but this is no reason to let the advent of winter send a chill down your spine ... we've put together a **winter wellness guide** to ensure you make it through the cooler season with a warm glow in your heart, a healthy smile on your face and a cheery spring in your step ...





(called the envelope), which protects the virus as it passes from person to person. Once the virus enters a person's respiratory tract, the warmth of the body melts the envelope and the virus is finally capable of infecting the cells of its new host (researchers liken this process to that of eating an M&M – when in your mouth, the crispy protective covering softens and melts away). Conversely, during the warmer months, the protective gel melts to a more liquid state in the atmosphere and no longer offers protection; hence the virus loses its ability to survive in the open and infect people. Viral infection is further assisted during winter because the cool, dry air (due to less humidity) compromises the integrity of our respiratory tract, making it easier for viruses to adhere to and infect us.

## What can you do to protect yourself? Build up your herbal and nutrient armoury!

**Echinacea** – It is impossible to go past this tongue-tongling Native American herb, which numerous studies show has a positive effect on our non-specific immunity or our first line of defence for attacking viruses and bugs. Echinacea helps the immune system remain on high alert, and is available in formulations for kids as well as tincture, capsule and tablet form for adults.

**Vitamin C** – It supports our immune responses and can reduce the severity and duration of common winter problems. Because vitamin C is water-soluble and not stored in the body, it needs to be supplied from food or supplements. Remember, the vitamin C content of foods is easily damaged by cooking or poor storage, and lifestyle habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol and overconsumption of simple carbohydrates, as well as stress, can all adversely affect our vitamin C status.

**Olive leaf** – A potent antimicrobial herb that is effective against viruses, bacteria, yeast and fungi. Similar to echinacea, it can be used as a preventative, and during illness.

**Elderberry** – A key herb for treating sinusitis, a complication for many people after a head cold or flu. Studies show that elderberry is anti-inflammatory, antiviral and improves the symptoms of influenza such as fever, fatigue, headache, sore throat, cough and body aches. It does this in less than half the time that it normally takes to recover. Delicious elderberry syrup can be added to boiling water and given to children to soothe sore throats and fever.

**Garlic** – The active component in garlic, allicin, is antibacterial and antiviral; it boosts immune function, is an antioxidant and supports the cardiovascular system. Garlic can be taken in supplements if you don't like the smell, the fresh bulbs can be chopped and swallowed, added to soups, stews, and of course, garlic bread. Oh, and it's also great for warding off vampires!

**Zinc** – It has a positive effect on our immune system. Sprays and lozenges help reduce the symptoms, severity and duration of colds, flu, sinus problems and sore throats. Always seek the advice of a health professional when

### Get movin' and stop shakin'

Forget sitting around shivering, and get outdoors during the day, every day. Go for a walk – the park, the local municipal gardens, a beach, river or lake, or even just round the block.

**Regular exercise** improves circulation; great if you suffer from cold hands and feet, while the sunlight helps keep your vitamin D levels topped up, and wards off seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

**Vitamin D** is manufactured in our skin and is important for healthy bones and correct calcium utilisation. It is found in small amounts in fish, butter and eggs, and is available in supplement form.

**SAD or the 'winter blues'** is a type of depression that is experienced by some people during the months of decreased daylight hours. It is characterised by periods of mild depression or anxiety, lethargy, irritability, low libido, carbohydrate cravings and a weakened immune system, leaving people with this condition susceptible to colds, flus and other opportunistic infections. SAD is thought to occur because of an imbalance between two brain chemicals, serotonin and melatonin. In addition to getting an hour outside in the sunlight each day, the herbal supplement 5HTP can also help normalise serotonin levels. Chat to a health professional if you think you may be experiencing SAD.

### Why is it that the cold and flu viruses seem to thrive in winter?

Influenza viruses are usually spread from person to person through coughs and sneezes. Studies show that cooler temperatures harden the outer gel-covering of viruses

supplementing with zinc, as too much can cause nausea, and it can interfere with other nutrients such as the absorption and utilisation of iron, copper and vitamin A.

## Traditional foods and witches brews – These tried and trusted remedies are not to be sneezed at!

### • **Lemon and honey drink** – Nothing new here right?

But add some chilli and you improve circulation – warming those extremities, clear chronic congestion, support lung health, and provide an extra dose of vitamin C.

- A green tea teabag popped in will provide more antioxidants for immune support.

- For flavour, my favourite is some fresh ginger and cloves or cinnamon, and a big teaspoon of manuka honey.

- Lastly, for the over-eighteens – add a good measure of whiskey or rum ... while not providing any nutritional benefits, these wee additives are great for relaxing the mind and body, allowing the body's natural healing processes to kick in ... that's my story, and I'm sticking to it!

• **Chicken soup** – Plenty of researchers agree chicken soup helps thin mucus in the lungs, breaks up congestion and eases nasal secretions, as well as being anti-inflammatory. This is put down to the amino cysteine that is released from the chicken when you make the soup. Throw in some hearty winter veges such as yams, carrots and kumara, some garlic and fresh garden herbs such as parsley to boost the nutrient profile and voila! A delicious and nutritious medicine food.

• **Crack up, but don't stress out!** A good belly laugh or 10 each day is the perfect way to not only help your immune system, but also your heart, blood pressure, muscles and digestion! Looking on the funny side may initially annoy some of your more solemn acquaintances. However, it won't be long before they are joining you in improving their wellbeing with a sly chortle, because it's highly infectious. Laughter is the one bug you want to circulate during winter!

## Laughter

- decreases stress hormones, increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thereby improving your resistance to disease.
- triggers the release of endorphins, natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of wellbeing and may even temporarily relieve pain.
- relaxes blood vessels and improves blood flow, helping protect against heart attacks and other cardiovascular problems.
- exercises the abdominal organs and intestinal tract, exerting a beneficial toning effect on digestive processes.
- hearty laughter can burn kilojoules equivalent to several minutes on an exercycle or rowing machine (I know what I'd rather be doing).

Look for the comical side to everyday situations and occurrences. This is a fantastic way to avoid becoming stressed in traffic jams or the supermarket queue. Remember, it takes fewer muscles to smile than to frown.

## Over-acidity

A low pH, or more acid body, has been shown to provide a more hospitable environment for viruses and bugs to flourish. Stress, some household cleaners and personal hygiene products, alcohol, high protein diets, junk food and coffee are some contributors to low pH – things that are almost impossible to avoid these days.

1. Take a calcium and multimineral supplement to help the body become more alkaline.
2. Daily shots of barley grass, chlorella, wheat grass and spirulina are excellent alkalisers.
3. Apple cider vinegar, most fresh fruit and veges, pure water, meditation and yoga all rebalance acidity.



## 6 Quick tips for feeling great and looking even better



1. Less humidity can lead to dry skin; avoid super-hot baths and showers that strip away natural oils (sebum).

2. Dry skin brushing before you shower is great for assisting your body with eliminating toxins.



3. Catch those Zzzzz's! Never underestimate the power of sleep as this is the time when our body repairs and rejuvenates.



4. Increasing your fluid intake (water, herb teas) keeps your skin and body hydrated – plumped-up in a good way!



5. If participating in snow sports and pastimes, wear a sunscreen – the snow reflects approximately 85pc of the sun's rays, like a mirror, giving your skin a double-whammy of UV.



6. Cover your eyes too, as snow blindness – sunburn of the cornea and conjunctiva, is painful, can cause permanent damage to your sight, and will really interfere with your après-ski fun! ❄️

