

Cold weather cures

Embrace those brussels sprouts and parsnips to enjoy perfect winter time health. *By Elizabeth Montgomery*

Wintertime corresponds to the water element in traditional Chinese medicine. This is the season that's associated with deep yin energy which is reflected in the cold, short days and long, dark nights. It's important at this time to wrap up warm to protect from the cold which can challenge our immune system - making us more susceptible to viral infections. The delicate kidney organs in particular must be nourished, supported and protected, since it's very easy for them to go out of balance during this time. Physically, the kidneys are related to the health of the hair on our head, teeth, knees, bones, sexual vitality and energy levels. They also correspond to the emotion of fear and willpower. The good news is it's actually easy to support these important organs and boost our immunity, so long as we tune into the winter seasonal rhythm, and adjust our lifestyles accordingly.



Embrace fermented foods

Fermented foods are gaining popularity although they have been around for thousands of years. They are the key to the maintenance of healthy bowel flora in the gut which is so important for immune system health. In fact, it's now widely accepted that at least 80% of the body's immune system is located in the lower intestinal tract. Sauerkraut and pickles are two common foods that are probiotic powerhouses - adding in good bacteria - and greatly helping to boost immunity. Other delicious fermented foods include: coconut-based yogurt and kefir, miso, kimchi and tempeh.

Enjoy parsnips

Root vegetable like parsnips hold yang (male) properties and are warming for the body during the winter. Parsnips are a cream colour and have a distinctive sweet flavour. They contain vitamins from the B-complex group and a fair amount of vitamin C, vitamin K and E. They also contain age-defying antioxidants from the poly-acetylene group which are anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal and may have cancer protective properties. The high mineral content, along with vitamin C, help make it possible to survive the long, cold winter months (provided they are only lightly cooked) to ensure the vitamin C is not destroyed. They can be served roasted and also make a nice alternative to mashed potatoes. Alternatively, try them grated raw and mixed together with raw beetroot, green leaves (like watercress or kale) and walnuts for a colourful and healthy wintertime salad. The delicious options are endless for this delightful root vegetable.

Tune into the season

The winter season requires practices that conserve our energy. The long, cold dark nights require us to go to bed a little earlier and rise a bit later, which helps to keep us in tune with nature's rhythm. It's a good time for observing one's dreams and to incorporate practices like meditation, to help quiet the mind, and go within. It's also wise to include gentle stretching exercises first thing in the morning, and last thing at night, to help ward off the contractive effect of the cold weather.

Sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes offer far more nutrients to the body than the common white potato. They are very good for soothing digestive upsets and are known to target the health of

the stomach and spleen in eastern medicine. This deep orange potato is rich in a wide spectrum of nutrients and is best eaten with the skin on to ensure its nutrients are intact. Potassium rich, regular consumption may help with lowering blood pressure since potassium plays a major role in ridding the body of excess sodium and regulating fluid balance. They are rich in the antioxidant beta carotene which is converted into vitamin A in the body. Enjoy them raw together with other green vegetables in an alkalising juice. Also delicious when mashed, they offer a uniquely sweet flavour and are delicious with a touch of coconut oil and cinnamon added in to the mix. Like all vegetables, they are best eaten organic to optimise their flavour and multiple health benefits.

Nourish your energy centre

The kidneys are the body's energy centre and are nourished by supportive foods that often contain the blue/black colour spectrum. Therefore, kidney beans, beetroot, black beans, black sesame and chia seeds are all beneficial especially during the winter season. Salty foods also correspond to the kidneys and can help to build up their life force. But rather than using rock crystal salt, go for much healthier and more gentle alternatives such as: celery seasoning, mineral rich seaweeds like kelp and hiziki, or tamari sauce instead.

Go Brussels Sprouts

Brussels Sprouts belong to the cruciferous vegetable plant family which includes broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and kale. These are small green bud shaped vegetables that are literally bursting with a wide spectrum of nutrients which help to nourish our bodies throughout the cold winter months. They contain important antioxidants vitamins A and E. And are also a rich source of powerful flavonoid antioxidants which have cancer protective properties including indoles, sulphoraphane, zeaxanthin and lutein. Vitamins are plentiful, including B vitamins and the lesser known Vit K (known as the blood clotting vitamin). Key minerals include calcium, potassium, zinc, iron, manganese, copper and boron. They can be lightly steamed, or added to stews (best towards the end of the cooking process to ensure vital nutrients are not destroyed). Get creative and include them into your diet on a regular basis. You will soon notice just how delicious and versatile these little buds are.

Enrich your drinks

Water is crucial for numerous bodily functions and help the kidneys to flush out toxins. Drink at least 1 litre of pure clean filtered water daily along with teas and vegetable juices to help give extra warming properties to the body. Experiment by including grated ginger and lemon before meals to aid digestion or drinking warming liquorice tea. Cloves are also great when added into teas and work a treat to help support the kidneys and boost circulation on cold winter days. Additionally, help your body to remain warm by adding supportive spices to alkalising green vegetable juices such as turmeric, ginger and garlic. ॐ

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WARMING SPICE AND ALL THINGS NICE

CINNAMON: has a strong affinity for the kidneys, warming, and helps stabilise blood sugar

GARLIC: acts as a natural antibiotic and antibacterial agent in the blood stream

TURMERIC: a natural antioxidant, contains anti-inflammatory properties and aids liver detoxification

CAYENNE PEPPER: helps relieve chills, coughs and congestion and contains Vitamin C

GINGER: the garlic of the east, valued for its antibacterial, warming and kidney supportive properties

HORSERADISH: acts as a strong decongestant and is also good for digestion of fatty foods

BLACK PEPPER: prized for its warming, digestive, antiseptic and antioxidant properties

CARDAMON: acts as an expectorant and assists in cleansing the respiratory passages