

Did you get your  
**BOOST.**  
today?

## Nutrition for Winter

When the weather changes we must be prepared, not only with appropriate clothing, but with appropriate foods. When we think about winter it is common to associate this time with eating heavier meals that are perhaps more calorie dense than in summer, plus many people do less sport in the winter months, thus leading to weight gain. The weather outside might be frightful, but your diet doesn't have to be! It is still important to make sensible choices about your nutrition and exercise during the colder months to save you having to do a complete overhaul in the spring!

### **Winter nutrition for immunity:**

Low calorie or high calorie intakes during the winter months can have a negative effect on your immune system, thus leaving you more susceptible to illness. If you want to boost your immune system, there are a few things that you can do to help. The most obvious might be consuming a wide variety of fruits and vegetables daily, which contain vitamin C as well as antioxidants and beta carotene (for orange/red coloured fruits/veg), can significantly help to boost your immune system.

### **Tips:**

- Studies have indicated that for those who eat low amounts of fruits and vegetables, taking a 1000mg supplement of vitamin C (daily) can help to reduce the risk of illness as well as its duration.
- Keeping a healthy balance of good bacteria in your gut is crucial. Taking probiotics daily helps to support your immune system by providing the good bacteria that line your intestines and help us to fight infections. Eating fermented "live" foods such as kefir, sauerkraut and yogurt helps to provide probiotics, however they also contain salt, sugar and calories. Consuming these foods is fine, however for a daily boost a probiotic supplement is better. *Always take probiotics after a course of antibiotics to help get your gut flora back in balance.*

### **Winter nutrition for health:**

As the days get shorter we have a significantly reduced exposure to sunlight. You may well arrive at work in the dark, sit in an office all day, then leave again when it's dark! Where possible you should always try to get outside at some point during the day, however as this isn't always possible, we need to discuss how to help support your body during these cold, dark days.

Our main source of Vitamin D is sunlight. One of the first signs of a low level of vitamin D is an inability to think clearly and muscle weakness. Long term issues relate to bone weakness and the risk of rickets in children. It has been proposed that during winter months people should consume a daily vitamin D supplement, if their daylight exposure is poor and their intake of vitamin D-rich foods is low (foods rich in vitamin D: cod liver oil (be aware of vitamin A levels), wild salmon, tuna, fortified dairy products, sardines, egg yolk). People at risk of low vitamin D levels during winter are: breastfed infants, older adults, people with limited sun exposure, people with dark

skin, people with inflammatory bowel disease or those who have had gastric bypass surgery.

Serotonin levels can also fall during the winter months. This can lead to low mood and food cravings. It is no coincidence that during the winter months we see sweet potatoes and pumpkins in season – this is the food our bodies need. These are the foods that provide a great source of beta carotene for immune function as well as support a boost in serotonin levels. High fibre (complex carbohydrate) foods also boost serotonin levels e.g. wholegrains.

**Tips:**

- Take a daily vitamin D3 supplement (15 micrograms for adults)
- Limit caffeine and sugary foods as these lower serotonin levels.
- Increase wholegrain foods such as brown rice, wholegrain breads/pasta, lentils etc. to boost serotonin, the “happy” hormone..

**Winter sports nutrition:**

Anyone who exercises in cold weather needs to take a few precautions to stay warm, safe and perform at an optimal level. Correct nutrition helps regulate your body temperature and provides enough energy for your working muscles.

In the cold weather your metabolism increases slightly to warm and humidify the air you breathe, and you tend to burn a few more calories to stay warm. Breathing in cold, dry air forces your body to warm and humidify that air and with each exhalation, you lose significant amounts of water, therefore hydration is vital when out on the slopes (something many people don't consider).

The ideal foods to choose when you have spent a significant time in cold temperatures are complex carbohydrates and proteins (consumed 2 hours prior to exercise): warm soups, chili, low fat cheese and bread, pasta with tomato sauce, baked potatoes, cereals, peanut butter and lean meats are all good choices.

It's also important to take regular snacks to replace carbohydrate stores that are being used for exercise and warming. If you don't replace this energy you will likely feel more fatigued and you will feel the cold much faster.

**Tips:**

- Drink plenty of water (for adults, around 2.5-3L)
- Eat a variety of complex carbohydrate foods (high in fiber)
- Eat a small snack every 60-90 minutes when doing vigorous exercise (100-200 calories) e.g. handful of mixed dried fruit and nuts or a small energy bar.
- Choose hot food and drinks whenever possible
- Decrease caffeine consumption (to prevent dehydration)
- Don't drink alcohol (alcohol dilates the blood vessels and increases heat loss)