

WARMING FOODS by Natasha Zamburro ND

Winter eating does not mean Nachos in front of the television with lashings of sour cream, cheese and guacamole. Winter is a time to nurture the spirit, feed the soul and rejuvenate with high energy, nutritionally dense and sensory appealing foods. Avoid the high calories, saturated fat and thigh busting behaviour this winter and set yourself up for a Cinderella start to Spring by using Winter as your healthy hibernation and revitalising period.

The term 'warming foods' does not relate to the temperature of food, rather it is the thermogenic (warming) effect the food has upon the body when it is digested, assimilated and absorbed. Warming foods are considered a part of Seasonal eating, a philosophy relating to selecting and consuming foods of the season. This practise is used by many cultures throughout the world and is an innate behaviour inherent in all of us. A great start to seasonal eating is to purchase fruit and vegetables that are 'in season' from your local organic market to make it easier to practise seasonal eating and aim for the warming options to enhance Winter health.

The thermogenic (warming) effect of food also helps you to feel more satisfied with your meal and as such you have a tendency to eat less. Digestion is maximised as warming foods are easier to digest and assimilate and they are more beneficial to your Gastro intestinal tract in Winter. Your immune system also benefits from warming foods as they tend to be more nutritionally dense and have high bio availability during the cooler months. Temperature does play apart also as nutrients are more easily assimilated as certain phyto-nutrients are more easily released when cooked such as flavones bound to fibre in vegetables and certain fruits. Cooking tomatoes greatly increases lycopene availability, especially when cooked in oil, whereas only a small percentage of lycopene is absorbed when tomatoes are eaten raw.

As Winter approaches you may experience symptoms such as dry skin, blocked sinuses, cough and cold symptoms and it is advisable to start to pay extra attention to boosting your immune system. Nourishing and supporting your immune system with dietary tips is a good start. Exploring the nutritional philosophy and practise of some ancient healing traditions below provide some tips and knowledge that you may apply to your Winter regime.

Ayurveda means "science of life" and has been practiced in India for over 4,000 years. This ancient system of natural medicine incorporates a similar key philosophy by identifying a life source which is attributed with maintaining health and wellbeing. In Ayurveda this life force is known as prana and it is the interaction of our lives with the environment, stressors, diet and lifestyle that can either optimise or reduce this life force. According to the Ayurvedic medicine tradition of the tridoshas: kapha, vata, pitta, the seasons have a natural effect on the body and the strength of the individual is enhanced and/or maintained by adopting suitable dietary and lifestyle techniques according to the season to optimise health and wellbeing. If the external environment is similar to the dosha in nature the accumulation of these characteristics occurs and may manifest as a physical symptom. For example, Kapha increases when the weather is wet and cold, Vata increases in dry, windy, cool conditions as in Autumn and Pitta increases in Summer. So cooling conditions and food are best utilised in Summer and Pitta aggravation, while warming foods are best when Kapha or Vata aggravation is dominant. During winter there is a natural accumulation of Kapha and Vata due to the cold, wet and damp weather so it is important that effort is made to ensure that you compensate for this natural accumulation by off-setting this Kapha and Vata dominance by keeping warm and dry.

Jaoharagni, the internal digestive fire, is maintained with light, warming foods and as it becomes stronger it maximises digestion, assimilation and excretion. It is important not to overeat as the result will be a dampening of the internal digestive fire and Kapha functions best on small meals. Drink tea made of cinnamon, nettle and ginger to tonify and ease the accumulation of Kapha, you may also drink this before bed if desired. Of course the traditional Chai tea which is very popular is also fantastic for the Winter period. Maharishi Ayurveda Kapha tea is great as a wake up brew

and eases lethargy and congestion, it contains ginger, cloves, pepper, cardamon, turmeric and saffron. Some general nourishing foods for all dosha types during winter are: sweet potato, carrot, pumpkin, beetroot, spinach and green peas. A great desert or breakfast idea is stewed apple and pear with cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. This is highly nutritious and warming over the season and also has a nurturing sensory appeal.

According to the system of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) it is important over winter to tonify and support the stomach, spleen and kidneys. It is also common knowledge to keep the 'triple warmers' warm during this period. Keep yourself clothed with warm clothes, adequate warm bedding and ensure your kidneys are kept warm to prevent cold and damp from disturbing or blocking your Qi. TCM warming foods are: Red Meat, eggs, chicken, fish, root vegetables, garlic, onion, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamon.

Japanese culture and cuisine chooses to consume a diet high in warming and nutritionally dense food over this period. Miso soup, tofu, gyoza dumplings, udon noodles, egg noodles and teriyaki marinated meat dishes are consumed to maintain warmth and nutrition of the digestive system and overall wellbeing. The use of green tea provides antioxidants for the immune system and L-theanine which is naturally occurring and is the relaxing yet stimulating effect that is produced after tea drinking.

Mediterranean cultures are very knowledgeable when it comes to seasonal changes and how it directly relates to clothing choice, lifestyle and dietary factors for maintaining health and vitality. Traditional foods such as meat, potatoes, soup, pasta, risotto, eggs (frittata) minestrone, lasagne, roast with vegetables, artichokes, chicken soup, pepperonata and stews are considered warming in nature and highly nutritive during winter. Peas, beans, lentils and a variety of pulses were used in Ancient Roman and Grecian times due to the highly nutritive nature, abundance and availability of the pulses as well as the general warming nature of the food. This practice is still seen in Modern Mediterranean cuisine with beans and pulses are incorporated into soups, stews and with meat dishes. The protein combination of this food source is extremely beneficial to balance the overall protein profile and provides B vitamins for the nervous system.

During Winter refrain from harsh detox regimes, although you can still partake in 'soup days' which are extremely nutritive and beneficial to give your digestive tract a break from heavier 'stodgy' foods over Winter. The French use a traditional and extremely cleansing Leek soup which works wonders to counteract previous overindulgence. Warm food and drinks that have a heating effect should be the main option over cold or frozen food and drinks straight from the fridge during Winter.

To increase and maintain your energy, vitality and immune system over Winter it is important to remain hydrated and keep up the exercise to prevent lack lustre complexion, cold and flu, creeping Winter weight and ameliorate a sluggish mental outlook. Gentle Yoga practice such as Sun Salute is a dynamic and heating practice which is perfect for Autumn and Winter. Backbends, flowing asanas and standing poses are energising and warming.

Keep in mind that artificial heating can be extremely dehydrating and the reluctance to drink water can be a combination that results in dry flaky skin over the body, dry heels and flaky scalp. Remember to include the beneficial Omega 3 essential fatty acids by using fish oil, cold pressed extra virgin olive oil or flaxseed oil in your daily diet to encourage hydration, immune and circulatory benefits.

Your internal and external comfort and warmth should be considered equally and efforts should be made to relax in a warm environment and wear warm, dry clothing. If you find yourself wet from the rain dry off as soon as possible and keep in mind your shoes should be removed to prevent damp rising from the feet if your shoes, socks and/or stockings get wet during a downfall.

Wheat bags, warm baths, saunas, sunbaths, house heating and extra blankets are all beneficial to reduce Kapha and Vata. Keep yourself active by partaking in gentle exercise and dry massage is also preferable during winter, if oil is used ensure that the room is heated adequately and the towels are heated for use on the body at all stages of the massage.

Warming foods list

Root vegies

Meat

Eggs

Onion

Dairy

Ginger

Cardamon

Cloves

Cinnamon

Basil

Rosemary

Parsley

Cayenne pepper

Butter

Cabbage

Mustard greens

Stewed fruit

Parsnip

Leek

Dates

Peas

Lentils

Beans