

BY EDNA BRANDT AND CLAYTON SPIVEY

## Staying Healthy in the Winter

The weather forecast for tomorrow is below-freezing temperatures and lots of snow. The kids will be home from school, the car probably won't start, and you hate the thought of shovelling the sidewalk. You've got to get to the store to stock up on essentials: bread, milk, toilet paper and chocolate chip cookies...just like everyone else. You know you must get there early or the shelves will be empty.

You are experiencing the phenomenon of winter: the need to conserve and replenish. Without reserves, you would feel afraid of not making it through the winter storm. Nature does the same thing: most animals hibernate or nest securely, going out only to replenish food stores.

Winter is a gathering-in time, still and quiet—trees hold their energy deep within their trunks and roots. Life is held internally and underground. We should gather our energy in, too. It is just fine to have some “down time.” In order to stay healthy in the winter you must conserve your energy—rest when you are tired and sleep later in the morning if you can. The Chinese medical classics say, “Retire early at night and rise late in the morning; wait for the rising of the sun.”

*The Farmer's Almanac* suggests those living in moderate or mild climates store their seeds in the refrigerator over the winter to ensure a long “winter” of cold and dark, enabling the seeds to gather power for an energetic start in the spring. One of my patients, a successful

workshop speaker, was lamenting that she had no scheduled workshops the next year. I encouraged her to look at December as a wonderful gift at the right season, a time to take stock and gather her energy, spend some internal time in contemplation, meditation and rest, so that she could bring better energy to her work next year.

The gestation time of winter is important. Did you ever ruin a project by talking about it too soon? Did you ever have something fail because it was put into action too soon? A good winter means a powerful spring—restored energy, clear vision, a sense of purpose.

### PHYSICAL LEVEL

In your body, all functions need fluids: every cell must be lubricated, bathed and cleansed. There are many fluids in the body: blood, sweat, urine, tears, lymph, joint fluids, hormones, cerebrospinal fluid. The organs associated with the Water element are the kidney and bladder. Imbalance may show up as disturbance in these organs or in the fluid balances in your body (dryness or over-wetness, such as sweating or edema).

### EMOTIONAL LEVEL

Water controls our ability to flow through life and through emotions, to respond and change appropriately. The emotion associated with Water is fear. When Water is out of balance, you can be frozen,



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paralyzed, out of life, cut off from your power. Or, you may be too fearless, risking too much without the exercise of good judgement. An appropriate amount of fear is called *caution*. The squirrel who came to my backyard birdfeeder was more hungry than cautious. When the cat pounced, the squirrel fell victim to his own lack of caution.

#### **MENTAL LEVEL**

Are you fluid enough to take on life's challenges? Or are you brittle and inflexible, unable to bend with life's circumstances? On the mental level, Water governs cleverness and skill, thinking clearly, proceeding systematically, finding the natural flow from start to finish. Water gives us the ability to be calm and clear. When the water is out of balance, there can be stubbornness and rigidity, turbulence and chaos.

#### **SPIRITUAL LEVEL**

Water gives us the courage to manifest who we truly are. The spirit of Water is *will*—the power that moves us, that keeps us persevering and enduring through the hard times. Without that will, we can despair, resign, and give up on life.

If we find ourselves in a spiritual "winter," we need to realize that inevitably, our energy will renew. "Spring" will come and hope will appear.

#### **Practical Advice for Winter**

- Conserve energy; sleep when you are tired
- Rest more; having some down time is healthy and appropriate
- Drink plenty of water
- Eat foods of the season: stews, roots, meat, warming things
- Keep the back of your neck covered, especially in the wind
- Spend some internal time: contemplation, meditation, reading
- Be receptive to your caution and fear; allow it to fuel you
- Make sure your projects have some gestation time before you expect them to manifest; don't rush into spring too soon
- Allow yourself to dream without committing to action