Inner Health
Nutrition Consulting

Welcome to the Holiday Season!

As winter settles in, our routines, energy levels & eating habits naturally shift. Shorter days, colder temperatures, and changes in sunlight don't just influence our mood, they directly affect our hormones, sleep cycles, metabolism, and even the foods we eat and when we eat them. If you find yourself struggling with these seasonal changes, you are not alone. This month's newsletter focuses on some of the strategies to modify what you may be experiencing.

Let's explores how winter impacts hormone health, why cravings feel stronger this time of year, how to support steady energy and balanced blood sugar, and even how to make your holiday baking a little more nourishing. With a few simple habits, you can stay grounded, energized, and aligned with your body's natural rhythms all winter long!

Focus less on perfection but more on self-care, nourishment, movement, sleep, being present to fully embrace everything this time of year brings. From our families to yours, we wish you a healthy and happy Holiday season.

Cheers,

Filomena & Claire

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Your Registered Dietitian &
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Reminder: Your Extended Health Benefits Expire December 31st!

This is a perfect time of year to prioritize yourself and your health! Don't wait for the New Year to set those resolutions that fail time and time again.

Get yourself off to a great start NOW. Better yet, tap into your extended health benefits and utilize Registered Dietitian benefits (if they are included in your plan). Let us help you strategize this Holiday season and help you feel empowered again and in control!

Give the office a call to book your appointment **TODAY**

Click **HERE** to get started!

The Holiday Mindset Reset

Embracing food as a means of gathering, celebration & nourishment!

1. Shift Your Focus from Perfection to Balance

One of the biggest misconceptions around holiday eating is that we need to be "perfect" by avoiding dessert and sticking rigidly to our possibly unrealistic goals. But this approach often leads to feelings of restriction which can trigger guilt and shame. Instead, focus on balance. Allow yourself to enjoy all foods in moderation, but also make sure you're nourishing your body with nutrient-dense meals and between-meal snacks to keep you energized and fuelled.

Mindset Shift: Practice the "80/20 rule." Aim to make 80% of your meals and snacks nutrient-rich and balanced, and leave the other 20% for holiday foods you love. There is room for all foods to fit, anytime of year!

2. Mindful Eating: Savour the Flavours, Avoid the Guilt

Mindful eating is about being present in the moment, paying attention to your body's hunger and fullness cues, and truly savouring your food. It's easy to eat mindlessly leading up to and during the holidays, especially when you're distracted by family, conversation, and many obligations. But eating mindfully allows you to fully enjoy the flavours of your food and helps prevent overeating.

Mindset Shift: Before digging into a festive meal or dessert, take a moment to pause. Take a deep breath and then appreciate the smells, textures, and colours of your food, as well as those that surround you. Eat slowly and listen to your body's cues. When you start feeling satisfied, stop.

3. Say YES to Holiday Foods Without Guilt

It's important to remember that food isn't just fuel..it's also about enjoyment, tradition, and culture. The holiday season offers many beloved treats and special meals, and we encourage you to savour your favourite foods. In fact, enjoying these foods mindfully can make it more satisfying and prevent the feeling of deprivation that often leads to overeating later.

Mindset Shift: "Be Picky Choosy". You have heard me say this if you have been my client. If there is so much to choose from, be "picky choosy" and choose your favourite holiday foods and savour them without guilt. Focus on the quality and experience rather than quantity.

4. Set Self-Care as a Goal this Holiday Season

The holidays are a busy time, and your usual routine may be disrupted. Have you seen the shopping malls already? Set realistic expectations for your health and fitness goals, but keep to a routine. Prioritize your self-care time, and build in opportunities for movement and maintain regular, healthy eating. Whether it be packing snacks as you hurry around or keeping water bottles with you wherever you go, set intentions to take care of you!

Mindset Shift: Don't forget about yourself this holiday. Maintain your routines but be flexible. Include movement into your day! Ensure adequate sleep, and set intentions to eat regularly and stay hydrated. Your self-care is the most important gift you can give yourself.

5. Investing in Yourself Now Will Pay Off in the New Year

Starting the new year already feeling good in your body can make all the difference. Rather than waiting for January 1st to re-start your health goals, why not shift your

mindset to maintaining these now? Resetting your mindset around food and health during the holidays means that come the new year, you're not playing catch-up because you're already on track. You'll feel empowered and confident, not overwhelmed by the "New Year's Resolution" pressure that often comes with drastic dieting changes.

Mindset Shift: The holiday season is meant to be a time of connection, celebration, and enjoyment. By shifting your mindset and practicing a balanced, mindful approach to food and self-care, you can fully embrace the season without feeling guilty or overindulging.

The Science of Winter Cravings

and why our winter cravings are more instinctive than indulgent

The Reason for Your Sweet Tooth

When cold weather comes, and days become shorter, something in our body and mind shifts, both biologically and subconsciously. As the temperature drops, your body works harder to stay warm, which increases energy use and naturally drives cravings for quick, comforting foods. Research shows that people tend to eat more in the fall and winter, often reaching for richer, sweeter flavours, which is an instinctive, seasonal response built into our metabolism.

Serotonin Dips

Shorter days also mean less sunlight, which can lower serotonin, our "feel-good" neurotransmitter that regulates mood and appetite. When serotonin dips, it's common

to crave carbohydrates and sweets for a temporary mood boost. That warm cookie or peppermint mocha isn't just tempting…it's your body's way of seeking warmth, comfort, and a little lift during darker days (4).

Body temperature regulation

Colder temperatures increase the body's demand for energy to stay warm. This can lead to increased hunger and a preference for calorie-dense foods like fats and carbohydrates to meet this energy need. However, this doesn't mean your body needs significantly more food in winter. These cravings are more of a biological signal than a requirement. A balanced diet with nourishing proteins, healthy fats, and fibre-rich carbohydrates remains the most important way to support energy, mood, and overall health during the colder months (5).

Evolutionary Factors

Historically, winter presented a scarcity of food. An evolutionary tendency to eat more and store fat during colder months was a survival mechanism to endure periods when food was hard to find. Even though we have access to food year-round, some of this instinct may still remain, which may explain increased appetite during winter (6).

Comfort food and traditions

Beyond biology, there is emotion. With the cold weather comes the holidays. Sweet and spiced tastes, vanilla and cinnamon scents, warm and nutrient-dense stews and pies, are often tied to baking with family, and gatherings with loved ones. The cold weather can lead to a psychological desire for comfort, which is often associated with warm, rich, and sweet foods. This is how our traditions during winter months can also contribute to increased consumption and cravings (7).

Sensory perception

As humans, we are wired to connect scent and emotion, as our sense of smell is directly linked to the brain's limbic system: where memories and emotions live. This can explain why we crave certain tastes during the holidays. Additionally, colder air affects how we perceive scents. Because molecules don't move as quickly in low temperature, denser scents and aromas are more easily detected and can be perceived as more comforting, further encouraging cravings for such foods (7).

Winter Habits for Hormone Health

1. Be Vitamin D Conscious:

With reduced sunlight and less time spent outdoors during winter, Vitamin D levels tend to drop. This can cause a weakened immune system, affect hormone regulation, and even contribute to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Ensure you are getting enough Vitamin D by incorporating it into your diet through fatty fish, eggs, fortified milk, mushrooms, or talk to your healthcare provider about supplements (12). Haven't had your blood level of Vitamin D checked recently, ask your doctor!

2.Maintain A Consistent Sleep Schedule:

As the seasons change, it is normal for our sleep habits to also change. However this can have a significant impact as we are ignoring our body's natural rhythm when it comes to sleeping in winter. Proper, deep 7-9 hours of sleep per night is essential to keep our circadian rhythm aligned. A consistent bed time, avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evening, stopping eating at least 2-3 hours before sleep, and limiting screen time before bed can all help to reach a deeper REM sleep so that your body can restore, repair, and regulate your hormones, immune system, and overall energy for the day ahead (1).

3.Keep Time With Your Circadian Rhythm:

Our circadian rhythm is responsible for coordinating the release of our hormones that tell our body when it's time to sleep, wake, and eat, as well as regulating body temperature, digestion, heart rate, and blood pressure. In winter, reduced sunlight disrupts the circadian rhythm by signaling the brain to release melatonin earlier, causing you to feel tired sooner. This can lead to a "circadian confusion" that impacts mood, sleep-wake cycles, and energy levels, potentially leading to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, getting a dose of morning light, staying active regularly, and reducing blue light (screens) near bed time can help realign your body's internal clock (2).

4.Seasonal Impacts on Blood Sugar:

In winter, blood sugar levels can be impacted by stress hormones like cortisol, which increase insulin resistance and raise blood sugar. Additionally, decreased sunlight can lead to lower vitamin D and disrupted sleep, while colder temperatures, the flu, holiday eating, and less physical activity can all contribute to higher blood glucose levels.

By pairing carbohydrates with a source of protein and getting regular physical activity, these can help your body better blood sugar and improve insulin sensitivity. Additionally, a breakfast high in protein, healthy fats, and high-fibre complex carbohydrates is a great way to start off your day by promoting steady blood sugar and preventing mid-morning crashes. Balanced breakfast food ideas include greek yogurt with berries and nut butter, egg omelet with veggies, and avocado on whole-grain toast and fresh berries (3).

Bottom line: choose a few changes you feel confident integrating on a consistent basis. Will it be taking a mid-day walk outdoors, or establishing a better bedtime routine, or eating more balanced to help maintain improved nutrition and energy

levels? Focus on 1-2 realistic changes and set that as your December goal.

Winter Metabolism Myth Buster

As the days get darker and temperatures drop, it's common to feel hungrier, more tired, and a little "slower", but does that mean your metabolism actually slows down in winter?

Surprisingly, no. Research shows that our basal metabolic rate (BMR) stays relatively stable year-round (8), and in some cases, cold exposure can even increase metabolic activity by activating brown fat in our bodies that burn calories to generate heat through thermogenesis (9). So the idea that our bodies automatically "power down" for winter is more myth than fact. So why do some people feel like their metabolism becomes more sluggish this time of year?

- **Lower physical activity**: shorter days, colder temperature, and more time spent indoors may lead to less walking and more sedentary time. Less physical activity naturally reduces daily energy burn.
- **More comfort foods**: We tend to crave warm, carb-rich, energy-dense foods in winter. This is driven by biology and psychology, not a slowed metabolism.
- **The holiday season**: winter brings more family and friend gatherings which change our eating habits, both patterns and choices.

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- **Seasonal mood changes**: some people experience lower mood and increased stress which can affect appetite, motivation to exercise and sleep patterns
- **Less cold exposure**: Being bundled up indoors means we don't get the metabolism-boosting effect of cold-induced thermogenesis as often.

The bottom line is that our metabolism isn't slowing down this winter, but your habits might be shifting. Supporting your energy levels comes down to balanced meals, regular movement, and consistent routines. If winter has you craving comfort, slowing down, or reaching for sweetness, remember, it's not a flaw, it's your biology adapting to the season. With mindful habits, you can recognize these changes and integrate some strategies to redirect your behaviour so that you can feel your best all winter long.

Remember! As your Registered Dietitians, we are perfectly positioned to individualize strategies to help overcome some of these winter-induced challenges. This time of year is in fact an ideal time to work on yourself!

Holiday Baking Made Better

Arguably, one of the best aspects of the holiday season is the baked goods that we get to make and share with our loved ones. The good news is that with a few ingredient swaps, you can bake your favourite recipes by making them a little more nourishing with the same great taste. Some smart swaps include…

- **Choose whole-food flours**: try almond flour, oat flour, or whole wheat flour for extra fibre and nutrients.
- **Try natural sweeteners**: replacing refined sugar with maple syrup, honey, or coconut sugar will still add sweetness and add vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that refined sugars lack.
- **Add seeds or nuts**: adding chia seed, flaxseeds, walnuts, or hemp hearts to cookies, muffins or loaves is a great way to increase fibre, omega-3s, protein and flavour.
- **Lighten up on the sugar**: don't be afraid to reduce sugar in the recipe by 25%. Most recipes are made to be really sweet, so by decreasing the sugar you'll rarely notice the difference.

Gluten-Free Snickerdoodles

Cranberry Orange Olive Oil Cake

Raspberry Thumbprint Cookies

Gluten-Free Blueberry Cobbler

Vegan No-Bake Brownies

1. Winter, sleep and circadian rhythms **https://sleepeducation.org/winter-sleep-and-your-circadian-rhythms/**
2. Winter depression **https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2768314/**
3. Managing diabetes in cold weather **https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/articles/managing-diabetes-cold-weather.html#:~:text=What to know,your health in cold weather**
4. Seasonal alteration in taste detection **https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8930022/**
5. Humans in the cold: regulating energy balance **https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31863637/**
6. Seasonal cues to food scarcity and calorie cravings **https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0950329321002615**
7. Why cold weather triggers sweet cravings **https://malibuapothecary.com/blogs/clean-candles/cold-weather-cravings-explained-the-science-of-food-and-fragrance-in-winter?srsltid=AfmBOoodPi0C1JcV6vpB2-tiHMBCcOgZ-OmnpTeQ1kyXoNrWoNfwtd_t**
8. Lack of seasonal differences in BMR **https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27410533/,**
9. Effect of acute cold exposure on energy metabolism **https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35837014/**
10. Image **https://shopnaturescraft.com/blogs/news/seasonal-wellness-for-women-how-to-balance-hormones-during-the-winter?srsltid=AfmBOopRbdfJO1CQVEbKn2uATQRf86erPnpvfQDYZns1dOtaOc-KBMX5**
11. Image **https://justingredients.co.uk/blogs/posts/a-world-of-flavour-traditional-christmas-food-from-around-the-world**
12. Vitamin D **https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3166406/?utm**