

Healthy Winter Habits

When it's cold outside sugary comfort foods are often on the menu. The problem is that while they're keeping us warm, they're also expanding our waistline.

Nutritionist Susie Burrell shares some simple and effective tips on staying healthy this winter.

"If you want to stay healthy throughout winter, choosing foods that are based on vegetables, fruits, wholegrain breads and cereals will head you in the right direction," explains Burrell.

During winter we naturally burn more fat because our body temperature is forced to adjust to change in temperature. Burrell believes that many Australians are very lazy when it comes to winter and because our physical activity drops we need to be careful not to overindulge in the wrong foods.

"A great tip is to load up on curries and chillies as both will fill you up and keep you warm," she says.

Burrell also suggests drinking green tea for antioxidants and eating pumpkin and carrot because they are low in calories and will keep you warm.

Planning meals in advance means we are less likely to snack on junk foods, however if you can't resist the temptation Burrell recommends having a low-fat hot chocolate or a small piece of your favourite chocolate.

"People need to change the way they think about winter," she says. "We need to think of winter as a time to nourish ourselves."

She recommends taking time out to enjoy the company of friends and family and starting a new exercise program rather than sitting at home watching television.

Susie Burrell's tips for staying healthy this winter

- Maintain regular exercise, plan extra sessions with friends and swap workout times to the afternoon when it's warmer.
- Drink 8 glasses of water a day
- Get outside each day for some light — vitamin D from sunlight is needed for optimal mood.
- Eat more soup — plain soup before a meal has been shown to reduce your total intake of calories by 20 percent.
- Drink more green tea and add in some chilli to help fat burning.
- Plan your food in advance so you are not tempted by extra treats.
- Try not to overuse heaters; the body burns extra calories keeping you warm so using a heater or electric blanket can stop this.
- Limit high-fat treats such as pizza or dessert to once each week.
- Make sure you are getting good fats every day from nuts, oily fish and soy and linseed bread.
- Weigh yourself regularly to make sure it doesn't start to creep up.

Super foods for winter

- Citrus fruits — these nutrition-packed fruits (oranges, mandarins, grapefruit and lemons) are a great source of vitamin C, which has been shown to help fight infection by enhancing immune system function.

- Pumpkin and sweet potato — both are an excellent source of the antioxidant beta-carotene (responsible for their yellow-orange colour) that helps to reduce oxygen's damage to body cells. In addition, sweet potato has a low GI level which is great for your blood sugars and keeps you feeling fuller for longer.
- Soup — it's hot, tasty and nutritious. Soup is perfect for those wintery days. Not only do most soups provide a number of vegetables, they also provide water which is often forgotten about during winter. Hot liquid also helps break up congestion and liquefy mucus.
- Tea — for 5000 years the Chinese have used tea to treat many ailments including colds and coughs, body aches and pains. Tea is a natural source of antioxidants called flavonoids, which help strengthen the body's immune system.
- Garlic — garlic's very distinct smell can be attributed to allicin which has been shown to have an antibacterial and antiviral power. In its raw form, eating garlic regularly can help to prevent a cold taking hold.
- Ginger — like garlic, ginger has been shown to improve the immune system's ability to fight infections. It also has a warming effect on circulation which helps to reduce fever.