

How Wintertime Affects Our Eating Habits



We're more likely to be hungry — and for not-so-healthy fare — when the temperature drops. Here's why that is and how to make healthier choices this season.

Soup is warm and comforting — like any winter food should be — and allows for easy incorporation of produce into a meal.

Cooler temps, fewer daylight hours, and more time spent inside while COVID-19 is still a major concern can all have a significant effect on when, how much, and even what we're hungry for. It may be part of our biology, explains New York City-based Laura Cipullo, RD, author of *The Women's Health Body Clock Diet*, thanks to the winter months triggering biological changes that stimulate hunger and increase cravings for more energy-dense (read: higher-calorie) food.

And there are also other factors, such as feeling stressed from COVID-19-related changes to work, school, and home life, that can contribute to different eating patterns.

But just because we're more likely to lean toward hunkering down with mugs of hot chocolate and bottomless bowls of chili or cheesy pasta from late fall to spring doesn't mean we should. After all, diet choices can affect not only our weight but our mood as well.

Here's what experts such as Cipullo want you to know about how winter affects cravings and the foods you should be noshing on, so you can feel your best all winter long.

Winter May Actually Make You Hungrier

Many parts of the United States are chillier and darker this time of year. Could those factors affect the foods you're hankering for? Some researchers suspect cool weather may trigger an evolutionary relic inside us to fatten up to survive tough environmental conditions, the way many other animals do.

A previous study found that participants consumed an average of 86 more calories per day in fall compared with spring and ate more fat and saturated fat in the winter months. But the researchers who conducted that study also noted that over the course of a year that magnitude of "extra" calories was fairly small.

Another theory is that the change of season may influence the balance of some of the hormones that control hunger and appetite. A prior review that looked at data in people and in animals found that seasonal changes did affect many hormones related to hunger and appetite, including glucocorticoids, ghrelin, and leptin.

Fewer daylight hours may play a role in food cravings, too. Sunlight is one of the factors that trigger the release of the hormone serotonin, a neurotransmitter that has been shown to boost mood significantly. Carbohydrate intake (thanks to the insulin that gets released as a result) increases serotonin levels — which is why previous research suggests people may crave carbohydrates as a way to improve mood. That's particularly seen in people with

seasonal depression, who may have lower serotonin levels and mood because of reduced exposure to sunlight.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also wreaking havoc on mental health, which may be affecting our diet habits. A study published in November 2020 in *Frontiers in Psychology* that looked at how undergraduate students were handling the pandemic found high levels of fear, anxiety, stress, and depression. Other research suggests the issue is widespread — for example, an Israeli study in the October 2020 issue of *International Healthfound* these types of psychological difficulties to be common, with stress and frustration as the new normal.

One way to cope might be turning to comfort foods, which tend to be high in calories, and eating more of them than you would if you weren't stressed. A study published in May 2017 in *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* suggests there's a strong link between stress and binge eating, for example.

You Also Might Be More Likely to Crave Comfort Food During the Winter

Of course, just because we might be more likely to crave chocolate cake, croissants, and cheese in the winter months and especially during a stressful global pandemic doesn't mean overindulgence is wise. Those cravings are "hedonic hunger," says Cipullo. And while you can indulge in moderation every once in a while, she adds, we can certainly choose to satisfy our appetites in healthier ways, too.

It's important to note that a lot of wintertime overeating may be a result of opportunity and mind-set more than pure physiology, too. If you're newly working or studying from home during the pandemic, that puts you awfully close to the fridge and pantry — setting up an all day, every day buffet.



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If the weather is too cold, wet, or icy for you to spend much time outside, that could limit your activities even more, and the earlier darkness could become a cue for you to start snacking.

“Early evening is a vulnerable time for a lot of people,” says New York City-based Ellie Krieger, RD, a cookbook author and host of Ellie’s Real Good Food. “People tend to mindlessly snack then. That window is bigger in the winter.”

You’re also less likely to hit the farmers market for fresh veggies to nosh on simply because there are fewer open in colder months. COVID-19 restrictions could also mean your local market is closed. Anyway, what is available at farmers markets this time of year tends to be heavier fare, like starchy root veggies.

We tend to be less active in winter and to stay less hydrated. When the mercury dips, a tall cold beverage may be the last thing on your mind, but skimping on your daily quota of liquids can often be mistaken for hunger, leading to cravings, says Lisa R. Young, PhD, RD. New York City-based author of The Portion Teller Plan.

She recommends hot beverages, like tea or even just hot water with lemon, which will warm you up and keep you feeling full. Plus, in a previous study, researchers found that things that are physically warm, such as a hot shower or a warm drink, may help people feel happier and less lonely.

Winter Foods You Should Be Eating

“To satisfy both your body and mind, seek out comfort foods that fill your belly, warm you up, and make you feel good — but are also good for you,” says Krieger. There are actually a lot of them:

Soup It’s a great way to get more fiber-filled vegetables into your winter diet, since you can toss just about anything into a soup pot — greens, beans, lentils, whole grains, and veggies that might otherwise rot away in your crisper drawer. Add a lean protein, like chicken or shrimp, and you’re set. “It’s dinner in a pinch, or it can even be a snack,” Krieger says. Just be sure to choose a broth-based soup over a cream-based one, to save on unhealthy fats and calories.

Citrus Fruits While most fresh fruit is in short supply, winter is the time for citrus to shine. Krieger always has a stash of mandarin oranges to snack on, and you can make a great salad with some citrus and winter greens, like Swiss chard, chicory, or kale.

Broccoli, Cauliflower, and Brussels Sprouts Another fresh find when the air is nippy: cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts. “They are incredibly good for you and great for roasting,” says Krieger. “Just toss them with a little olive oil and a little salt and pepper, and stick them in the oven until they start to get brown.”

Salmon One nutrient experts agree is vital in winter is vitamin D. The limited daylight hours, the change in the wavelength of the sun’s rays, and less time spent outdoors mean most of us aren’t absorbing as much from the sun as we do in warmer weather, and vitamin D has been shown to play a crucial role in maintaining mood. Staying indoors for social distancing amid the pandemic can make your vitamin D levels drop even more. While you may benefit from a vitamin D supplement, the top dietary sources for vitamin D are fatty fish, like salmon — which also happen to be rich in omega-3 fatty acids, another mood booster, according to a study published in August 2018 in *Frontiers in Physiology* — and fortified dairy products.

If you’re going to give in to a craving — and most experts agree you occasionally should give in — watch your portions and, whenever you can, make healthful swaps. If you’re dying for a bowl of pasta and cheese, for instance, switch out regular enriched pasta for a whole-grain option and add lean protein to the mix, along with a few vegetables for vitamins and fiber.

If it’s dessert you want, enjoy a square of dark chocolate, which has been shown to help reduce risk of heart disease, according to a study published in December 2017 in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*. As Krieger puts it, “Now that’s feel-good food.”

3 Reasons Why Your Indoor Allergies Are Worse in the Winter (and How to Fight Back!)



Not all allergens hibernate.

Those with seasonal allergies might breathe a sigh of relief when the grass and trees go dormant for the season. But unfortunately, colder weather doesn’t spell relief for everyone.

Allergist Sandra Hong, MD, says being cooped up in the house can actually make matters

worse for people with indoor allergies for three main reasons:

Dust mites. “Dust mites can actually end up being in your pillows, your mattress, your box-springs, your carpeting,” Dr. Hong says. “And if you have a humidifier going at greater than 50% humidity, that will actually make dust mites grow faster so you’ll have a lot more of them.” People with dust mite allergies typically wake up in the morning feeling stuffy because they’ve been sleeping on a surface to which they’re allergic all night long. Use dust mite covers on your pillows, mattresses and box-springs and wash your linens (and stuffed animals) in hot water (over 130 degrees) and dry on hot heat.

Molds. Molds are parasitic, tiny fungi (like *Penicillium*) with spores that float in the air like pollen. And they can be troublesome this time of year. Dr. Hong recommends cleaning areas such as kitchens, bathrooms and basements with a bleach solution to keep them dry and mold-free.

Pets (sorry!) Because our pets tend to spend more time indoors with us during colder months, Dr. Hong says winter simply increases our exposure to them. Not allowing your pets in the bedroom (at all!) and keeping them in areas that aren’t carpeted can help cut down on allergy symptoms. Bathing pets weekly and brushing them outside is also beneficial, in addition to a lot of vacuuming.

How Dry Winter Air Can Cause Respiratory Problems— From Bronchitis to Nosebleeds

Tips for protecting yourself from common illnesses.

Few aspects of colder weather months can be as irritating as dry winter air. (Well, maybe when your snow plow service doesn't show up!) From fly-away hair to scaly skin, the cold winter air can wreak havoc on your body's appearance. But did you know that dry winter air also can make you vulnerable to illness?

Breathing dry air can cause respiratory ailments such as asthma, bronchitis, sinusitis and nosebleeds. Breathing dry air also can cause dehydration since body fluids are depleted during respiration.

"Your sinuses will dry out," says family medicine physician Daniel Allan, MD. "The mucus that normally should be gooey and thick and can trap infection gets drier. So you're more likely to get a cold because your mucus is not as able to catch things that you breathe in."

Why you should use a humidifier

Cold winter air is dry because it holds less moisture than warm air. Because wintertime humidity is so low, what little moisture that is around is quickly sucked up into the air. So moisture evaporates more quickly from your body, which dries out your skin, makes a desert of the inside of your nose and leaves your throat parched.

What's worse is that the furnaces that heat our homes can contribute to the problem by pumping our houses full of hot, dry air.

One way to combat the dryness is to add a humidifier — either for the whole home or within certain rooms. Another effective way to add moisture to the air is to place large bowls of water around the home. The water evaporates and adds moisture.

Home humidity levels should be somewhere between 30% and 50%, Dr. Allan says. Don't overdo the humidity. Too much can cause

mold growth and encourage dust and possibly cause respiratory issues, he says.

Why you also need to up your hydration

If you're already someone who is prone toward dehydration (we mean you with the dry, flaky, itchy winter skin), Dr. Allan recommends a few simple steps.

"Increasing your fluid intake is always good," Dr. Allan says. "The other way to treat it from the inside is to take omega-3 supplements. That can help normalize the fat in your skin cells, which helps keep the moisture trapped, and helps keep the oils on the surface of your skin."

Other tips for guarding against dry winter skin include:

1. Shorter showers.
2. Warm (instead of scalding hot) showers.
3. Apply a natural moisturizer (like coconut oil) before getting out of the shower to trap the moisture on top of your skin.

ONE-POT MINISTRONE SOUP

PREP TIME
10 min

COOK TIME
18 min

Ingredients

- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 3 rib celery, diced
- 2 carrots, diced (skin intact)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 15-oz can no salt added kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 28-oz can no salt added diced tomatoes
- 8 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 medium zucchini, diced
- ½ lb ditalini, orzo, or other small pasta, preferably whole-grain
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- Fresh parsley, for garnish (optional)



Directions

1. Place a large stock pot over medium-high heat. Add olive oil, onion, celery, carrots, and garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables are tender, about 5 to 7 minutes.
2. Stir in kidney beans, tomatoes, and broth and bring to a boil. Lower heat and allow mixture to simmer, about 5 to 10 minutes.
3. Stir in zucchini, pasta, oregano, and thyme and simmer until the pasta is tender, about 8 to 10 minutes. Serve garnished with parsley, if desired.

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LIVDA

PRECT

RUYLES

SPICEB

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Check out the new, free JUST JUMBLE app

Print your answer here:

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

I took your advice to heart, Doc.

Well, you certainly reduced your risk. Keep it up.

ONE WAY TO AVOID HEART SURGERY IS TO EXERCISE AND EAT WELL. THEN YOU CAN

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.