

The Healing Foods of Winter

So winter is not your favorite season. But did you know that winter may actually be the best season to improve your immune system and nourish your body?

In many Eastern medicine philosophies, immunity is directly connected to digestion. It is suggested that the human body's digestive system is naturally stronger in cold weather. Stronger digestion means, in most cases, a stronger appetite so choose your foods wisely and base them on those that are naturally abundant during the season.

Why seasonal foods? Foods that are naturally grown or harvested at this time of year may offer the best natural defense. The focus should be on easy-to-digest unprocessed foods. Extremely cold foods and those that are high in fat and sugar or over-processed can weaken digestion, so it is best to avoid those. Traditional fall and winter flavors such as nutmeg, cinnamon and ginger are warming to the body, increase circulation, and most certainly support digestion. Hearty vegetables that are rich in color contain immune-supporting bioflavonoids, beta carotene, and vitamin C that improve the body's ability to fight infection. Best known examples are butternut squash, pumpkin, and carrots.

So which are the single best foods to eat during the winter season? There are several seasonal foods that should be incorporated into the diet, but here are four that beg for the spotlight:

Garlic – This is a super food all year round for many reasons, but its potent antiviral properties make it especially beneficial during flu season.

Ginger – The root has been known to ease congestion in the lungs, increase circulation, soothe digestive complaints and nausea, decrease inflammation and act as an antioxidant.

Sweet Potatoes – They are high in fiber, minerals, beta carotene and vitamin C, all critical components in immune health.

Kale – Known as a strengthening food, it is supportive to liver function and is rich in calcium, potassium, magnesium, iron and vitamin C. Try it in place of cabbage in almost any recipe, especially soup.