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NEWSLETTER

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SEASONAL MOOD CHANGES

By Dr. Christi Hartman, Naturopathic Doctor

Winter in the Kootenays is a destination for many – skiing, snowboarding, backcountry adventures and much more. For some of us, though, the arrival of winter coincides with a drop in energy, motivation, and general get up and go. Seasonal affective disorder,

also known as SAD, refers to changes in mood that tend to occur during the winter months at Northern latitudes. Sadness, fatigue, difficulty enjoying hobbies and changes in sleep patterns are well known symptoms of SAD, but some people have more subtle changes like increased irritability and less patience, more negative thoughts, or a tendency to withdraw from social situations. Some people may even find themselves feeling more defensive or hostile towards others. One of the main factors thought to contribute to seasonal mood disorders is a change in serotonin levels. Optimizing your serotonin levels throughout the year can have a significant impact on your mood, and you might just find that a few simple changes turn your annual winter blahs into a thing of the past.

Serotonin is a hormone found throughout your body; as much as 90% of serotonin is actually in your digestive tract, where it plays a key role not only in digestive function, but also in regulation of appetite and cravings. In the brain, serotonin regulates mood and your general sense of well-being. When serotonin is low, people may experience depression, anxiety, insomnia and a variety of other mood changes. It is made from the amino acid tryptophan, which is found in most protein-rich foods. Serotonin levels in the blood tend to be higher in the summer when the days are long and there is lots of sun, and they have been shown to be lower in both the blood and specific areas of the brain in the winter.

Each of the following lifestyle changes have been shown to increase serotonin levels, and can help boost your mood, thought patterns, motivation and energy through the winter months.



Aerobic exercise: Exercise that stimulates increased heart rate and blood flow for as little as 15 minutes as been shown to increase serotonin, reduce negative thoughts, and calm anxiety.

Bright light exposure: Indoor lighting provides very little light compared to what we receive outside. On a clear sunny day, the light intensity can be as much as 100,000lux. An overcast day averages about 1000 lux. The average home and office are around 150-250 lux. Bright light therapy that provides 1000-3000 lux for 30 minutes a day can significantly improve mood and sleep.



- Note that you can get this intensity of light on an overcast day – so don't think there is no benefit to heading out for some fresh air on those overcast winter days. If you are working indoors during those precious winter light hours, think about investing in a full spectrum light for your desk that provides at least 1000 lux. Using bright light in the morning for 30 minutes can not only help boost your mood, it can also help with insomnia.



Positive thoughts: Your thoughts affect your brain chemistry. Negative thoughts reduce serotonin, and positive thought increase it. The trick here is that one begets the other – low serotonin triggers negative thought patterns, and it can be tricky to change those thought patterns. Mindfulness, the practice of checking in with ourselves to see what our inner self talk is, can be a useful tool to change thought patterns. One of my favorite books for a straightforward approach to mindfulness is Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Positive affirmations, transcendental meditation, and cognitive based therapy can also be very helpful here.

Beyond the basics: Our moods can affect every aspect of our lives, from the clothing we choose in the morning to our sense of authentic self-worth and life achievement. Don't hesitate to seek help if you are struggling with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anxiety or negativity. A first step can be trying some of the suggestions above – engaging ourselves with the natural world is one of our most powerful medicines.

THE POWER OF THE PEAR

By Stephanie Moss, Holistic Nutritionist, lifeflow.ca



Autumn in the Kootenays arrives with a generous harvest — trees heavy with apples, pears, and plums, each offering their own sweetness. Among them, the pear deserves a quiet moment of reverence — subtle, golden, and deeply nourishing. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the pear is considered a healing fruit — valued for its ability to moisten the lungs, cool internal heat, and nourish yin. It's often used as a gentle remedy in seasonal transitions, particularly in autumn, when dryness tends to affect the lungs and throat.

RECIPES

By Stephanie Moss, Holistic Nutritionist



**ROASTED PEAR & BUTTERNUT
SQUASH SOUP**

Ingredients:

- 8 cups peeled cubed butternut squash (approx. 2 medium squash)
- 1/4 cup oil, divided (avocado works best)
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 cups chopped yellow onion (approx. 1 medium onion)
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 2 cups diced peeled pears (approx. 3 pears)
- 1 litre organic stock (chicken or vegetable)
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 can coconut milk (400 mL)
- salt to taste

Instructions: Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and preheat the oven to 400 F. Toss the butternut squash with 2 tbsp of oil and bake for 40-50 minutes, until golden brown; remove from the oven and cool. While the squash bakes, in a large heavy bottomed pot, heat the remaining 2 tbsp of oil on medium heat and add the onion. Cook until soft and transparent, 3-4 minutes. Add the garlic and ginger and cook for an additional 2 minutes, until fragrant. Add the pears, stock, spices, coconut milk and roasted squash and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook for approximately 25 minutes or until the pears are soft, stirring occasionally. Using an immersion blender, blend the soup until smooth. Thin with more stock if desired and season with salt to taste. Garnish with a swirl of coconut milk and pumpkin seeds.

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PEAR & WALNUT SALAD

Ingredients:

- Mixed greens (arugula or spinach work great)
- 1 ripe pear, thinly sliced
- Crumbled goat cheese or vegan cheese (I like Miyoko's brand sold at the COOP)
- Handful of walnuts lightly toasted to bring out nutty flavour
- Balsamic vinaigrette (recipes below) or olive oil + lemon
- Optional: Add grilled chicken, tofu or a 1/2 cup of quinoa to make it macronutrient balanced.
- Balsamic vinaigrette - makes 4 servings)
- 4 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons fresh apple juice
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 pinch of sea salt one pinch of black pepper
- 2/3 of a cup of olive oil.

Blend all ingredients together in a blender and store in a glass jar with a lid for up to 1 week.



THE TURNING OF THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR: LETTING GO INTO AUTUMN

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SEASONAL TEMPERAMENT

By Vanessa Deverell, Registered Clinical Counsellor,
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Not everyone relates to autumn the same way, and this isn't about having a good or bad attitude—people also have very real differences in their constitution. Some people genuinely come alive in autumn's coolness. These tend to be the ones who spent summer feeling sweaty, stifled, or slightly overwhelmed, their naturally fiery constitutions finally finding relief as the heat dissipates. They breathe easier, sleep better, and think more clearly. For them, autumn isn't a loss but a breath of fresh air.

Others grieve autumn as a profound ending. These are often people whose bodies run cool, who spent all summer finally feeling warmth in their toes, whose joints and spirits both thrive in heat. As the temperature drops, they feel themselves contracting against the bitterness of the elements. They mourn the aliveness and easy freedom of summer, and perhaps the deep sense of safety provided by the abundant presence of the Sun.

Still others find autumn's earthward energy grounding in the best way. If you tend toward seasonal anxiety, overthinking, or feeling ungrounded, autumn's downward pull might feel like a relief—finally, something drawing your energy out of your spinning head and toward the solid earth. The season offers what you struggle to create for yourself: a natural slowing and mandatory rest.

There's no right way to meet autumn. Recognizing your constitutional pattern helps you work with your nature rather than against it. If you're someone who struggles with the cooling and darkening, you might need to be more intentional about warmth and light. If autumn energizes you, this might be your season for creative projects that summer's heat made impossible.

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