

How to stay healthy this winter following Eastern medicine guidelines

November 11 2014, by Nora Plunkett

While mainstream medicine recommends eating right, exercising and getting your flu shot to stay healthy during cold weather months, Eastern medicine takes this advice a step further.

"Traditional Chinese [medicine](#) teaches us to live in harmony with the seasons to protect our health," said Aaron Michelfelder, MD, a [family medicine](#) and [integrative medicine](#) physician at Loyola University Health System. "Making certain adjustments to our diet, sleep regimen and lifestyle will make us more in sync with nature and better equipped to cope with the plunging temperatures."

Dr. Michelfelder recommends the following Eastern medicine tips to "winterize" your body and protect your health this season:

- **Eat warming herbs and foods.** The environment and the food we eat can create imbalances in the body, according to Eastern medicine guidelines. Using warming ingredients for meals that are in season to counteract any imbalances created by the [cold weather](#). Warming herbs and foods include cinnamon, ginger, garlic, spicy foods, sweet potatoes, squash, meat and nutrient-dense soups and stews. Save raw, leafy greens for the summer.
- **Eat less.** We typically are not as active during the winter so we require less food. Cut down on your caloric intake.
- **Sleep more.** Traditional Chinese medicine recommends following the sun and sleeping more in the fall and winter because we have fewer hours of daylight. It is best to get nine to

10 hours of sleep as opposed to the recommended eight hours in the summer and spring.

- **Slow down.** We should expect ourselves to slow down naturally and be less active during winter months. This is a hard concept for many Americans to grasp given our busy culture.
- **Meditate more.** As our bodies naturally slow down, it is best to slow the mind as well through meditation. Don't resist what the body is naturally meant to do this time of year.
- **Turn to acupuncture.** An acupuncture winterizing treatment naturally restores balance and boosts energy levels.
- **Practice self-care.** Get a massage, engage in social activities and take a vacation, if possible. Self-care will help you recharge your body.

"Our immune system is naturally suppressed in the winter," said Dr. Michelfelder, who also is a professor at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. "Try not to fight the seasons. If we are not aligned with the natural cycles of life, we won't be able to recharge our immune system to protect our health."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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