

Eating right during the winter months can be easy

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM

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The long, dark, chilly days of winter have settled upon us. Many of us tend to be more sedentary during this time of year and gain unwanted pounds. Plus, many people already accelerated the process by picking up extra weight over the holidays.

The problem is compounded by indulging in winter comfort foods like hearty stews, casseroles and baked goods. Before you know it, you're carrying five to 10 extra pounds on your frame that you want to lose before spring.

The key to controlling winter weight, say experts, is actually simple. The first is to make sure that you incorporate some form of regular exercise into your daily routine. A minimum of 20 minutes a day, three days a week, of active movement will help your metabolism burn off extra calories and can be helpful in fighting winter doldrums.

The other key is sensible, balanced eating that takes advan-

tage of an array of winter foods and the nutrients they supply. The winter months foster more illnesses and access to germs due to time spent indoors; incorporating foods into your diet that nourish your immune system will keep you healthy, as well as fit.

Lillian Tull, manager at Edson Farms in Traverse City, said that during the winter-time, customers look for winter fruits and vegetables, juices and nutrients and vitamin supplements to insure that their health needs are being looked after and that they have a strong immune system to ward off illness.

"We're fortunate that people who come to our store are generally concerned about their health and most are aware that you need to do a few different things between January and March," said Tull. "One of the most important things is to insure that you get your daily required servings of fruits and vegetables and that you stay well-hydrated, which some might take for granted because it's not 90 degrees out. And for

specific health issues and concerns, there's a great range of vitamins and nutrients."

Nutritionists recommend concentrating on foods that are rich in Vitamin C like citrus fruits, broccoli, red bell pepper, strawberries and kiwi fruit. At least one serving daily will help your body defense against infection.

Foods with Vitamin E are also favored because they support immune health like nuts or sunflower seeds and use vegetable oils instead of other fats when cooking.

Winter brings a bumper crop of root vegetables to enjoy like turnips, rutabaga, parsnips, squash and Brussel sprouts that aren't available at other times of the year. Find some new recipes for preparing them and enjoy their healthy benefits at the same time.

Kathleen Brennan, kitchen manager at Oryana Natural Foods in Traverse City, said that consuming foods that are seasonal is one of the first considerations one should make for good winter nutrition.

Brennan references a book

called "Food For Healing" by Annemarie Colbin, which promotes the benefits of eating seasonally. And not just because certain items are available, she said, explaining that because one's metabolism is different with each season of the year and certain fruits and vegetables play into that.

"We follow some of that thinking as much as we can with what we carry here at Oryana," she said, "so you'll find lots of root vegetables and fruit rich in Vitamin C like oranges and grapefruits in the winter months. I also recommend things that are warm to help warm the body, like soups, stews and warm oatmeal and grains, and to be careful of your sugar, high fat and alcohol consumption, especially because you don't tend to burn up calories and sugars the way you can in warmer months."

Finally, Jennifer May, a registered dietitian and exercise physiologist who works with Traverse City's Fitness Center, among other area venues, said that she encourages those she's working with to set nutritional

goals and to look at lifestyle changes for the long run. She says that she avoids using the word "diet" and prefers to concentrate on a healthy lifestyle that takes mental, physical and societal elements in mind.

"At any season of the year, you should focus on the things that will enhance your life, not deprivation, prevent illness and being well," she said. "But in winter, remember that cutting calories too low can change your metabolism so that your body is holding onto calories, not burning them. Get plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and don't be afraid of healthy snacks and little meals of fruits and nuts. And when you plan a meal, include proteins through lean meats and healthy fats and work those fruits and vegetables in.

"Don't just look at numbers on a scale — the purpose is to improve your health and you're the one in control of that."

Nancy Sundstrom is a local freelance writer.

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