

Eating Healthy During the Winter Months

I'm not sure about everyone else, but during the winter months here in Michigan, I find myself feeling a little less healthy than I do in the summer months. Winter has a way of doing that to all of us. It's the prime season of hibernation. It's a time of year when we all tend to pack on the proverbial "winter coat", and lay inside where it's nice and warm.

Trying to eat healthy over the winter months can be a monumental task. During the summer months we are blessed with plentiful fresh fruits and vegetables from backyard gardens, or from one of our local farmers markets. Once winter sets in however, our fresh options become quite limited and our diets tend to lack the same healthy punch we so much enjoy over the summer months. So the question is this, how do we eat healthy in the winter months?

When we think about winter foods, "comfort foods", seem to become a staple in our diets. Hearty stews, meat and potatoes dishes, hot chocolate and warm dessert become the norm. The colder it gets, the thicker, richer, stick to your ribs type foods seem to creep into our diets. Well, for those of us who love comfort foods, we'll be all happy to know that there is a reason our bodies seem to crave comfort food during the winter months. With the sun showing less of itself over the winter, the natural serotonin levels in our brain are in decline. Our bodies are crying out for carbohydrates to help replenish those serotonin levels. The best way to met these demands are foods that are rich in whole grains, or to incorporate high quality carbohydrates such as sweet potatoes and squash. This can help raise your mood without the huge hit to your waistline. Just remember the key phrase here is high quality carbohydrates not solely carbohydrates

We all know that fresh fruits and vegetables provide us with better taste and the highest nutritional content. What do we do when these foods are no longer available? The answer surprisingly is to turn to frozen fruits and vegetables.

Many of us think of frozen produce as somewhat of a processed food when it comes to nutritional value. Not so. Frozen fruits and vegetables are very similar in nutritional value to fresh produce. Typically frozen produce is "flash frozen", shortly after being harvested, sealing in valuable antioxidants and nutrients. There still is nothing like garden fresh, but during the winter months, frozen produce will provide the power packed nutrients the body needs.

If your house is anything like my house, when serving your family cooked vegetables, the first thing they reach for is the butter for flavor. Do yourself and your family a favor over the winter months and try cooking or mixing in a little olive oil when preparing vegetables. Olive oil can provide a lot of flavor and greatly diminish the amount of empty calories your family consumes.

Lastly, whether you realize it or not, the majority of your winter will be spent indoors. Why not take advantage of that time inside and have a little fun in your kitchen. Don't be afraid to try something new. Spend some time cooking up some new dishes or try adding some new foods or flavors into the fold. You never know, you just might end up enjoying it.

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