

## Staying Healthy in the Winter by Strengthening the Body

*Prevention, prevention, prevention*

*“When a disease has already broken out and is only then treated, would that not be just as late as to wait for thirst before digging a well, or to wait to go into battle before casting weapons?”* from the Nei Jing, 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.

Many regular patients who have adopted consistent practices of self-care do not get sick, consistent with the goals and philosophy of Chinese medicine. True health is not just the absence of illness but the flourishing of the individual, and so it is with this in mind that we do our work together throughout all of the seasons. Winter is certainly a season of struggle for many with the absence of light and the presence of cold. In Chinese medicine the relationship of the individual to the exterior environment is always taken into consideration. To strengthen your body against the cold of winter and even the prolific springtime pollen, as well as the air-conditioning of summer, there are effective Chinese herbal formulas, some of which date back to the time of George Washington. Combined with other self-care practices, the individual can harmonize with the wide spectrum of frigid winters and the searing heat of a Washington summer. In this manner, the use of antibodies can be reserved for extreme conditions such as surgery. As germs become more resistant to antibiotics with the advent of the new generation of “superbugs,” it is incumbent upon each one of us to bolster our own immunity. For many people, a simple cold can be the downward cascade to bronchitis and pneumonia; our goal is to prevent the cold in the first place and to treat the first cold symptoms with the appropriate herbals.

From the ancient Chinese medical text, the **Su Wen**:

*The three months of winter are called the period of closing and storing. Water freezes and the Earth cracks open. One should not disturb one’s Yang. People should retire early at night and rise late in the morning and they should wait for the rising of the sun. They should suppress and conceal their wishes, as though they had no internal purpose, as though they had been fulfilled. People should try to escape the cold and they should seek warmth, they should not perspire on the skin, they should let themselves be deprived of breath of the cold.*

Some of the ways that patients tend to themselves effectively in winter:

Rest and sleep. This is the time of dormancy and hibernation in nature. Will you gather in your energy much like the plants that are storing in preparation for spring? Can you live according to the sun—rising a little later and going to bed a little earlier?

Develop an awareness of what is truly restful for you. Less noise? Less stimulation? Rest your eyes, go still and quiet and observe. What restores you?

Anchor in stillness. Conserve your energy with time for yourself—no appointments, no “to do’s”, obligations. Can you say “no” to the never ending whirl of activities and business?

In stillness, can you listen deeply—in a new way—to others at work and at home? Can you be in the unknowing rather than make up a story that suits you? Can you take the time to reflect? Listening and not reacting before speaking and planning before launching into new endeavors?

Are you assessing your resources—much like our grandparents did with regards to getting through the winter, taking stock of your stores and resources? Can you acknowledge your own personal gifts in order to make the best use of those gifts that are you? Can you share your gifts and talents with others and offer them your deep listening when they are in need?

As for nourishment, eat warming foods. This is the time for comfort foods such as soups and stews, root vegetables, yellow veggies, carrots, beets, squashes, curries, warming spices such as ginger. With the dry air, be sure to drink plenty of water and decaffeinated warm liquids.

Chinese herbals have proved to be effective in pre-treating and administering at the very first sign of a cold. With rest and with these herbs the first signs of your health being awry, the first signs of a cold or a sore throat will not worsen.

Read also *Rising Plague* by Brad Spellburg, infectious disease specialist at Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center.