

# Holistic Health: Nourishing Vitality in Darkness

BY JACKIE DOBRINSKA

Some of us feel challenged by the darker days of winter. The cold, gray weather and lack of sunlight can generate feelings of sadness and depression. Addressing the condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) holistically may include important elements like exercise, diet, nutritional supplements and—for some—talk therapy and pharmaceuticals.

Alleviating any kind of seasonal sadness may also include making friends with the darkness, creating an ally instead of an adversary. The darker days of winter offer an invitation for us to slow down and nourish the deepest layers of our vitality—that essence that governs mood, vigor, strength, aging, immunity, energy, and radiance.

According to Ayurveda, also known as Indian medicine, our fundamental vitality is based on an essence called *ojas*. Traditional Chinese medicine calls it *jing*. We are born with ample supplies of vitality, which is why kids can play all day and seemingly never run out of steam. As we age, the activities of daily living burn it up. If we live a hectic lifestyle without much rest, common in our modern culture, we can feel tired and fatigued.

To some extent, we can replenish this vital essence. The dark cloak of winter is one of the best times to do so.

Historically, before we ran our lives by lights and clocks, winter was an invitation to head indoors and sit around the hearth fire. It was a time to sleep and dream, eat and rest, tend to broken things, root down, and replenish ourselves for the seasons ahead. Today, we might find that same sense of contentment and ease anytime we sit around a bright fire on a dark night.

Unfortunately for most, this inward movement is more

an exception than the rule. Instead, we spend the first part of winter rushing around in holiday traffic, shopping under the buzz of fluorescent lights, checking off to-do lists, and running ourselves ragged with commitments. While potentially fun and rewarding, these activities continue to burn our vital essence.

If we don't take the opportunity of the darkness to rest, restore, and replenish, then at some level we will feel depleted during the remainder of the year. Here are a few simple tips for the darker days ahead.



## Eat Nourishing Soups

Warm, grounding foods supply the nutrients we need to replenish. Homemade bone broths or medicinal mushrooms, such as reishi, maitake, and shiitake nourish vitality. Add slow-cooked root vegetables, stewed whole grains, salty miso, and sea vegetables to make it more tasty.

## Rest Well

Resting is an art. Sitting down in front of the television is an easy way to turn off the mind, but it does not deeply relax the system. To rest well, turn off all screens, then try taking a warm bath by candlelight, relaxing with

a cup of tea made from grounding herbal roots. Try some gentle breathing exercises before bed.

## Take Your Herbs

Adaptogens are a category of herbs that build deep layers of vitality. Licorice is a gentle option, but be careful if you suffer from high blood pressure. Other tonics include ashwagandha, eleuthero, and astragalus, which some people take to bolster their energy reserves.

*This article contains general information about medical conditions and complementary treatment, and is not to be considered expert advice. Always consult your physician or other qualified healthcare provider before beginning any new treatment, diet, or fitness regimen. Jackie Dobrinska is a wellness coach and owner of Herbal Yogini who offers consultations locally and by phone. Find more recipes, practices, and tips at [herbalyogini.com](http://herbalyogini.com), or e-mail [jldobrinska@gmail.com](mailto:jldobrinska@gmail.com).*