

Five Top Winter Foods

During the winter months we are naturally prone to more coughs and cold. With busy schedules and lots to do during the Christmas festivities, a healthy diet often flies out of the window with late nights and lots of meals on the go.

Here are some of the top winter foods which you can easily include in your diet:

1. The pumpkin family

Vegetables from this family such as butternut, pumpkins and squash are now available all round the year from supermarkets. These vegetables are all great sources of beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is a vitamin A precursor. It belongs to the family of fat-soluble vitamins called carotenoids (natural pigment) that acts as a super antioxidant, protecting cells against oxidation damage. It is essential for vision, growth, cell division, reproduction and immunity. Beta-carotene is converted in the liver to vitamin A. And that is just what we need in our winter arsenal – powerful antioxidants!

Add butternut and other types of pumpkin to winter stews, soups, and risottos or have them on the side as roasted vegetables.

2. Probiotic foods

By now, everybody will probably know or at least have seen probiotic foods on the shelves. Probiotics are live bacteria that are added to food vehicles, mainly milk and yoghurt products in the form of lactic acid bacteria such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacteria strains. Probiotics are also widely available in supplement form. Probiotics are part of the good friendly bacteria which occur naturally in the intestinal tract of healthy human beings. The friendly bacteria are always in competition with harmful bacteria in the gut and play a major role in our immunity. During winter, we need to boost our probiotic intake to make up for increased exposure to germs.

3. Fish

Fish is healthy and versatile and an excellent source of zinc. Oily fish are the best sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Zinc increases the production of white blood cells, which are the body's soldiers and which fight off infections.

Studies have shown that omega-3 fatty acids play a role in preventing depression. During the cold and dark winter months this is just what you need.

Include fish at least twice a week in your diet. If you are stuck for ideas, try adding smoked mackerel to a chowder. Also, make use of tinned oily fish. They are quick and easy and they taste great on a toasted slice of bread.

4. Oats

A breakfast consisting of porridge oats, must be one of the best! Oats are classified as a low glycaemic index food, which helps to stabilize blood sugar levels by ensuring a slow and even release of glucose into the bloodstream. This mechanism helps to keep us fuller for longer, keeping sugar cravings away. Choosing oats as a breakfast option could therefore keep the kilos down during the winter months. Oats are an excellent source of fibre. Combine oats with fruit for a double low GI effect.

5. Tea

A nice cup of tea is all you need when you are coming in from the freezing cold. Apart from being the favourite British hot drink, tea has many health benefits. Research now shows that tea might also boost immunity. It needn't only be English tea, there are many other types of tea, such as chamomile and red bush tea that have antibacterial properties and contain antioxidants. This explains why tea has long been used to fight infections associated with colds.