

Recipes for Body, Mind, and Spirit Fortify Us This Winter

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Gentle? Kind? These words do not typically describe the winter months that are fast approaching. In fact, many consider Winter as rough and severe. Where gray clouds reflect gray moods, shorter days trigger short tempers and the whipping winds are like our minds whirling and whipping with anxiety and dread – a time we must endure. We use words that even sound like something to endure – bleak, harsh, gray and cold. But what if we are able to develop recipes that warm us and make winter a gentle and kind season of rest? We can begin gathering ingredients that blend together in a way that nourishes our emotions, allowing rest and renewal to flourish; a recipe that minimizes our short tempers, gray moods and whirling minds.

The winter blues are a mild form of an illness known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Despite its acronym, SAD is more than just feeling sad. Typically, 1 in 4 people are diagnosed with mild SAD; however, during the winter of 2020/2021 the National Institute of Health predicts that not only will SAD be more prevalent, many will develop acute symptoms during the months of November, December, January and February due to practicing social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic. The practice of social distancing has limited contact with family, friends, neighbors and co-workers, and led to people naturally withdrawing from others. In addition to social withdrawal other symptoms of the winter blues are low energy, excessive sleepiness, over-eating, weight gain. The NIH goes on to say that risk factors for developing Seasonal Affective Disorder include being female, being young (under 40), having a family history of depression or a personal diagnosis of depression or bipolar disorder.

Even with the expected surge of individuals diagnosed with SAD, we can develop Emotional Recipes that may fortify us through the winter. Think of this process as stocking up on essentials before the weather gets too bad. It's much easier to get creative while you're still feeling OK. You can even create a literal box that is filled with cards that include things you do to take

care of yourself – a Self-Care Recipe Box that has ideas jotted down and stored for days when you're not feeling OK. Each card can hold an idea, activity or memory of something that makes you feel better, lifts your mood, brightens your spirits and motivates you. The action of creating hand-written cards is also a way to rely on something other than cell phones or computers. And bonus – you get an added pop of dopamine when you create the card as well as when you follow the “recipe” you’ve noted.

Just as cookbooks and recipe boxes have categories like Appetizers and Entrees, your box should include recipes for the Body, Mind and Spirit. For instance, your “Body Recipes” could include “Seeking Light” with ideas & small actions you can take to get extra light in your day. These cards might list things like drink your coffee by a sunlit window, leave your sunglasses off when your outside, buy or borrow a “Light Box” which emits light similar to sunlight. Your “Mind Recipes” section might include pictures that make you smile, a playlist of your favorite songs, journal entries that describe people, places and things you love, crossword puzzles, poems or favorite quotes. Your “Spirit Recipes” could include prayers, passages from Scripture, meditation, cards with intangible words like Love, Renew, Fun, Faith, along with a list of things that define that word for you. Begin now, noticing the little joys in your life and start making your recipe cards.

When you're feeling down or depressed find your Recipe Box read one of the cards and begin following it. If your symptoms persist longer than 2 weeks, you may need to enlist help from a counselor or treatment program. If you'd like more information on how to get help for yourself or someone you love, call us. We're here to help.